FAMOUS WESTERN

QUICK-TRIGGER STORIES OF THE ROARING FRONTIER

10¢

5 COMPLETE NOVELETS

MARCH

HELL'S HOT CORNER
great new story by
G. W. Barrington

A LAWMAN RIDES ALONE
by
HAMILTON CRAIGIE

A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE

SADDLE WAR ON BOWLEGS CREEK
by
J. E. GRINSTEAD

only $39.95

FOR THIS NEW 1938
16-TUBE
TOUCH-BUTTON
MIDWEST
RADIO

During MIDWEST'S 18th Anniversary SALE

COMPLETE IN RICHLY FINISHED CONSOLE—NOTHING ELSE TO BUY—READY TO PLUG IN AND PLAY!

TERMS AS LOW AS 50¢ A WEEK!

JUST imagine a radio so big, so powerful, so luxurious—in a big, beautiful, richly-finished walnut console—selling at such an amazingly low factory-to-you price! It costs no more to operate, than an ordinary 6 or 8-tube set because its advanced circuit and improved design result in great current economy. In addition, its tremendous range (550 KC to 18,000 KC) and great reserve of power enable you to drive across the world and bring in weak, distant, foreign stations (10,000 and more miles away) like "locals". That's why careful buyers say: "Midwest gives you twice as much for your money."

GLORIOUS NEW TONE

Midwest gives you glorious, crystal-clear concert realism, brilliant world-wide reception and scores of advanced features, including Dial-A-Matic Tuning—at a sensationally low factory-to-you price! Zip! . . . Zip! . . . stations come in instantly, automatically, perfectly . . . as fast as you can push buttons. The famous Midwest factory-to-you plan, proven by 18 years of success, is just as exciting. It enables you to buy at wholesale prices . . . to save up to 50% . . . to make your radio dollar go twice as far . . . and to pay as little as 50 cents a week on the Midwest Easy Pay Plan. You get 30 days FREE home trial!

Write for FREE 1938 Catalog

MIDWEST (Factory-to-You) RADIOS

DEPT. MM68 MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION...CINCINNATI, OHIO, U.S.A.

Manufacturers of Quality Radios Since 1920

••• AND LOOK AT HOW MUCH MORE YOU GET FOR YOUR MONEY

- ★ *16 tubes for price of 8—*
- ★ *Faster Dial-A-Matic Tuning—*
- ★ *Not a cut-price set, but a bigger, more powerful, super performing COMPLETE radio in a big exquisitely designed console of matched Walnut—*
- ★ *Full Scope High Fidelity tone realism—*
- ★ *World-wide range—*
- ★ *Foreign stations like "locals".*

LET US SEND YOU THIS MAGNIFICENT NEW MIDWEST RADIO ON 30 DAYS FREE TRIAL IN YOUR OWN HOME!

PASTE COUPON ON 1¢ POSTCARD... OR Write Today!

MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
Dept. MM68 Cincinnati, Ohio

Send me your new FREE catalog, complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer, and factory-to-you wholesale prices. (Special offer and prices prevail only when dealing direct with factory by mail.)

Name.....
(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

Address.....

Town..... State.....

User-Agents Make Easy Extra Money. Check ☐ Here for details.

When jobs are looking for men —thats news!

1 Look here, Frank—Two full columns of male help wanted—your kind of work!
Yes I noticed it—Last year at this time there wasn't half that much
2 H'lo, Frank—you're an office man—Do you know where we could get a manager for our Accounting Department?
Gee—I wish I could qualify!
3 You say Mary's husband just got a new job at double his old salary?—That settles it, Honey—the time has come for us to get out of the rut, too. I'm going to write LaSalle tonight!
4 1 year later—
I stayed late at the office, Honey, to get off my last examination paper—now I'm somebody!
That's swell, Napoleon—here's a letter that came today
5 Honey, look at this!—We're out of the rut at last! Doherty & Co. want me to come and see them—just the job I wanted! And say—am I glad I'm prepared for it!

. . . . . NOW IS THE TIME! . . . . .

RIGHT now, in many lines there is a search for really *good* men—managers, leaders—men who can take charge of departments, businesses, branch offices, and set things humming.

As always, there are not enough ordinary jobs to go 'round—but rarely before in the history of American business, has there been so much room at the *top!* New jobs are being created by the business pick-up in almost all lines.

Ordinarily, there would be plenty of men to fill these jobs—men in junior positions who have been studying in spare time. But most men have been letting their training slide during these dark years of depression . . . "What's the use?"—You have heard them say. Perhaps there has been some excuse for sticking to any old kind of a job one could get the past few years—but the door is wide open for the man with ambition *NOW!*

And don't let anyone tell you that "Opportunity Only Knocks Once"—that's one of the most untruthful sayings ever circulated. Opportunities flourish for *every* American every day of his life.

Far more to the point is to be ready—be *prepared*—to make yourself *interesting* to the big-time employer—and, LaSalle offers you a short-cut method of qualifying for opportunity jobs in accounting, law, traffic, executive management, and kindred occupations.

LaSalle Extension is 30 years old—nearly 40,000 students enroll annually—60 American firms each employ 500 or more LaSalle-trained men—surveys show that average LaSalle students attain good salary increases after graduation—nearly 10% of all C. P. A.'s in the U. S. A. are LaSalle alumni—in two states over 60% of the C.P.A.'s are LaSalle-trained men.

Why not find out what LaSalle has done and is doing for men in *your* position? Send and get the facts; see what LaSalle can do for you, personally!

There's no question about it—business is picking up—jobs are looking for *trained men*—the time has come for you to *qualify* for prosperity. Mail this coupon today!

LaSalle Extension, Dept. R-110 Chicago.

Kindly send me your free booklet on the business field I have checked—and tell me how your training in that field can help me.

☐ Business Management ☐ Business Correspondence ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Law ☐ Commercial Law
☐ Business English ☐ Traffic Management ☐ Accountancy ☐ Bookkeeping ☐ Stenotypy

Name..... Position.....

Address..... Age.....

LASALLE EXTENSION—adult business training

FAMOUS WESTERN

CLIFF CAMPBELL, Editor

10¢

ALL STORIES COMPLETE! Magazine

5 SHORT NOVELS IN EACH ISSUE

Vol. II, No. 1 — *March, 1938, Issue*

CONTENTS

HELL'S HOT CORNER ..... **G. W. Barrington** **6**

Doubletown they called it, but it should have been Troubletown, because there a ready boot-hill awaited waddies with itchy trigger fingers, and renegade's noose was a rangeland curfew for inquisitive star packers.

SADDLE WAR ON BOWLEGS CREEK ..... **J. E. Grinstead** **30**

The dry homestead on Big Bowlegs Creek looked like a hopeless proposition until Clell Berry started to investigate—and then it became a very lively one, indeed.

TROUBLE FER A HOSS WRANGLER.... **Henry Herbert Knibbs** **50**

An old Texas cow horse sees his first rodeo and corkscrews the world's champion bronc twister to a fare-thee-well.

DEPUTY SHERIFFIN' ..... **Edwin Hunt Hoover** **67**

Law rides in the saddle and life and death hang on the turn of a card in this gunman's stronghold.

A LAWMAN RIDES ALONE..... **Hamilton Craigie** **84**

Sudden death awaited lawmen in the outlaw town of Fredonia, but Annister merely buckled on his twin sixes and invited a lone grave in boot-hill to do his duty as he saw it.

AN EXTRA ACTION-PACKED SHORT STORY

POWDER PAYMENT FOR PAYROLL SNATCHERS, **Harrison G. Streeter** **103**

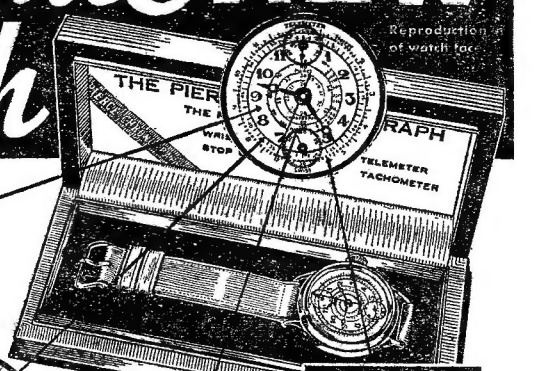
An ex-Pinkerton cattle detective plays an explosive sort of a game with a gang of stage robbers.

FOR THE BEST IN POPULAR FICTION, READ A DOUBLE ACTION MAGAZINE—Double Action Western, Real Western, Western Action Novels, Real Northwest Magazine, Complete Northwest Novel, Adventure Novels, Smashing Western, Action Packed Western, Double Action Gang, Blue Ribbon Western, Blue Ribbon Sports, Cowboy Romances, Ten Story Sports, Intimate Confessions, Famous Western Magazine **LOOK FOR THIS TRADE MARK.**

A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE

FAMOUS WESTERN MAGAZINE, published every other month by Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc., North Canal Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 60 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y. Copyright, 1937, by Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Yearly subscription 60c. Single copy, 10c. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes, and submitted at the author's risk. For advertising rates, write—Double Action Group, 60 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y.

Sensational NEW 4 in 1 Watch



THREE EXTRA FEATURES AT NO EXTRA COST!...

For merely a fine timepiece, you'd have to pay at least $19.75! Just think of owning, in this one beautiful, compact instrument, not only the most accurate timepiece you ever had—but *ALSO*

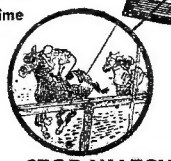
1. *A STOP-WATCH* that at the touch of a lever checks off the time in seconds, and *fifths* of seconds! There is no other accurate "split-second" stop-watch for less than $15!

2. *A TACHOMETER* that gives you at a glance the correct speed at which any moving object is traveling over a measured distance. A reliable, guaranteed tachometer would cost you $40!

3. *A TELEMETER* which tells you the number of miles you are away from any simultaneous source of light and sound. A good telemeter has never been sold at less than $50!

$125.00 Worth of Features for only $19.75 and ALL IN ONE WATCH!

TIMEPIECE
Accurate Time



STOP WATCH
Split-Second Time

TACHOMETER
Tells Miles Per Hour

$19.75

TELEMETER
Tells Distance Away

NOTHING LIKE IT!

Here's news of an amazing new kind of watch! Not only a more accurate, reliable timepiece—but also a *STOP-WATCH*, and a speed and distance indicator—all combined into one handsome, precision-built lifetime instrument—The Pierce 4-in-1!

Nothing like it has ever been heard of before! Instantly it has taken America by storm. Athletes, doctors, photographers, aviators, sports fans, radio workers—men in all walks of life clamor for it. Almost overnight it has become the most talked-of watch in America. And no wonder!

Just think of a timepiece built as only master-craftsmen can build one! A precision-built, non-magnetic 7-jewel watch, in wrist or pocket model, with a handsome chromium case and a non-tarnishable lifetime steel back. Think of getting its three EXTRA FEATURES AT NO EXTRA COST! Think of getting this super-timepiece for only $19.75—*less* than you would have to pay for just an ordinary watch!

PRACTICAL! INDISPENSABLE!

Haven't you always longed to own a fine Stop-Watch? Now you can time horse races . . . track meets . . . your favorite sporting event, radio shows, scientific experiments—anything you like in seconds and fifths of seconds! All you do is press a lever—and read the result on the dial! Amateur photographers find the Pierce Watch invaluable for split-second shots and darkroom timing. Men in the industrial, scientific and sports worlds, doctors, nurses—in fact anyone who wants a scientifically-accurate, special occasion stop-watch, combined with perfect time-keeping are enthusiastic about the amazing Pierce Watch!

As a tachometer, the Pierce Watch has no equal! It shows you instantly how many miles per hour a boat, plane or car is going over a measured distance. Aviators check their ground speed easily and quickly by means of this EXTRA feature!

Mariners and aviators find the TELEMETER feature of the Pierce Watch of tremendous value. Through this *"tell miles away"* feature you can instantly tell the distance you are from any simultaneous light and sound. For instance, to check the distance of an approaching storm, all you need do is press the lever at the first flash of lightning; the telemeter starts action, and at the clap of thunder, you stop the hand. The easily-read telemeter dial at once shows how far you are away from the storm.

SIMPLE TO OPERATE

Smart, trim, compact and neat, the Pierce 4-in-1 Watch is simplicity itself. One tiny lever controls all the EXTRA features. The separate dials are clear, simplified and easy to read at a glance. Once you own this sensational timepiece . . . once you discover how many times you need it . . . how amazingly useful and practical are it's EXTRA ADDED features, you'll never be satisfied with an ordinary watch again!

THE PERFECT GIFT!

Here's the perfect gift for Christmas, birthday, graduation or any extra-special occasion! A handsome, practical, useful present to be proud of . . . one that will give a lifetime of unequalled service . . . a gift that will be treasured and cherished through life!

DON'T DELAY! MAIL COUPON TODAY!

READ WHAT USERS SAY!

FAMOUS HOLLYWOOD MOVIE DIRECTOR: "By means of the telemeter feature on my Pierce Watch, I can tell exactly how many feet of film have been 'shot' over short periods of time. This saves waste and keeps costs down."

NBC RADIO DIRECTOR: "My Pierce is superior in every way to a $25 stop-watch I used to own. Now I get my shows timed right down to a fifth of a second, and they're always 'on the nose!' "

PHOTOGRAPHER: "You need to split seconds when you're getting certain shots. With my Pierce I never miss. And I wouldn't be without it in the darkroom—for certain, accurate timing."

AVIATOR: "My Pierce is the most accurate timepiece I ever owned, and in addition I check my ground speed with the tachometer, and duck storms by means of the telemeter feature. It's silly to carry just a timepiece when you get so much MORE with the Pierce!"

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE BOND

Pierce Watch Co., Dept. D.A.
22 W. 48th St., N. Y. C.

THIS IS NOT AN ORDER!

Please send me free literature describing the sensational new Pierce 4-in-1 Watch. I understand there is no obligation.

Name_____

Address_____

Town_____ State_____

If you want the Pierce 4-in-1 Watch immediately and cannot purchase from your dealer, enclose $19.75 in cash, money order or stamps with coupon. If not satisfied you can return purchase within 10 days and money will be refunded.

THIS EMPTY MEANS

IT takes brain to earn money—trained brain! The man without training is usually the man without cash. You can train your brain! Thousands of men have done it through spare-time study of I. C. S. Courses. Be a cash man—be a trained man—mail this coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 5992 SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Boilermaker	☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation	☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Building Estimating	☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Air Conditioning	☐ Chemistry
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio	☐ Steam Engineer	☐ Pharmacy
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Mechanical Engineering	☐ Steam Electric Engineer	☐ Coal Mining
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Bosses
☐ Management of Inventions	☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker	☐ R. R. Locomotives	☐ Navigation
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Patternmaker	☐ R. R. Section Foreman	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Diesel Engines	☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Highway Engineering	☐ Agriculture
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ Automobile Mechanic	☐ Civil Engineering	☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals	☐ Refrigeration	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Service Station Salesmanship	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Secretarial Work	☐ First Year College Subjects	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Spanish	☐ Business Correspondence	☐ College Preparatory
☐ Accountancy	☐ French	☐ Stenography and Typing	☐ Illustrating
☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Salesmanship	☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier	☐ Cartooning
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Advertising	☐ Railway Mail Clerk	☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

☐ Home Dressmaking	☐ Advanced Dressmaking	☐ Millinery	☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing		☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering	

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

YOURS BOYS! • GIRLS! BIKE GIVEN

Balloon Tires

Headlight; Horn; Tool Box; Coaster Brake. Yes, fully equipped. Chromium parts. A Mead make. A brand new sporty bike for every ambitious boy or girl!

YOU CAN GET a Boy's or a Girl's Model Bicycle like this or big cash commission for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** art pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with art picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog and plan book. Many other premium offers in catalog. Our 42nd Year. We are fair and square! — Sell one or more boxes of CLOVERINE SALVE in most every home. Old Cloverine Agents order now. SEND NO MONEY!—We trust you. Be First! Begin now. MAIL COUPON BELOW.

WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.,
DEPT. MS-87, TYRONE, PA.

GIVEN ELECTRIC MOTOR Driven Movie Projector

BOYS! GIRLS! GIVEN

SEE MOTOR

New Premium! Fully equipped with electric motor. Baked crystal enamel. Accommodates 200 feet film, eight minute show—two empty reels. Tilting device for angle projection. Reverse rewind to top spool. Framer, Reflector. SPECIAL bulb, cord and a plug. Size of picture 20 x 25 inches at a distance of ten feet from the screen. A Jim Dandy! Get one now! FREE 25 feet of Film valued at 75c included if you remit in 10 days! You can get this Projector easily by **Simply GIVING AWAY FREE** art pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remit as per our new premium plan catalog. Send no money. We trust you. Mail coupon. **Wilson Chem. Co. Inc. Dept. MS-87, Tyrone, Pa.**

GIVEN Floor Model RADIO or RIFLE Boys - Men - Women

GIVEN! Send No Money!

IVER JOHNSON 22-Cal. Bolt action self-cocking Safety RIFLE or a Genuine 5-tube AC Superheterodyne Floor Model Radio, long or short wave band, dynamic speaker—aeroplane dial. Striped walnut cabinet, 37 ins. high. An ornament to any home. **It's unusual.** Radio, Rifle or big cash commission yours for **Simply GIVING Away FREE** art pictures with famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for burns, chaps, sores etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remit as per new big premium plan book! Our 42nd year. Be first.

WILSON Chem Co., INC. Dept. MS-87, Tyrone, Pa.

Mail Coupon!

1938 MODEL STREAMLINE AEROFLITE WAGON

Send No Money!

GIVEN

A Beauty! A REAL COASTER WAGON—with a big streamlined all metal body, size 20 x 48, with 8½ in. ball-bearing wheels and 1-inch rubber tires. Yours for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautiful pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for chaps, burns, etc., easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture Free) and remit as per our catalog.

WILSON CHEM CO., INC. Dept. MS-87, Tyrone, Pa.

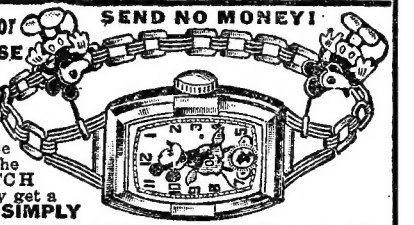
Newest type steering

BE FIRST! MAIL COUPON NOW!

GIVEN

Big Guitar or BANJO or MICKEY MOUSE WATCH

SEND NO MONEY!



Standard Size Guitar, regulated—fretted ebonized finger-board, pearl position dots. —Tenor BANJO with 11 inch rim—16 flat top brackets—inlaid position, calf-skin head, patent pegs. See Mickey Mouse on the Dial of the watch! In colors, too! See the two charms on the bracelet. WHAT A WATCH FOR BOYS AND GIRLS! . . . You can easily get a Guitar, Banjo, Watch or big cash commission by **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautifully colored Art Pictures with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE used for burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog. Many other valuable gifts. 42nd Year. We are reliable. BE FIRST!

Wilson Chem. Co. Inc. Dept. MS-87, Tyrone, - - Pa.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

WILSON CHEM. CO., Inc., Dept. MS-87, Tyrone, Pa. Date.....

Gentlemen:—Please send me 12 Beautiful Art Pictures with 12 boxes WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE to sell at 25c a box (giving picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per premium plan catalog sent with order, postage paid.

Name_____

R.D.____ Box____ St._____

Town_____ State_____

PRINT YOUR LAST NAME ONLY IN SPACE BELOW

PASTE COUPON on a Penny Postcard or Mail in an Envelope Today!

TRY - WILSON'S - COUGH DROPS - 5¢ EVERYWHERE

Doubletown, they called it, but it should have been Troubletown, because there a ready boot-hill awaited waddies with itchy trigger fingers, and a renegade's noose was a rangeland curfew for inquisitive star packers.

CHAPTER I

MURDER TRAIL

THE SLEEPER under the cozy little ledge that overhung the floor of the canyon threw back a corner of his tarp and drew his tall form to a sitting posture. Though something had aroused him, the first look at his surroundings was reassuring. All about his snug little night camp the frost-laced sagebrush was commencing to dew in the first warm glow of a sunrise

The stage had been held up and the driver killed.

Hell's Hot Corner

A QUICK-TRIGGER TALE OF THE ROARING FRONTIER

by G. W. BARRINGTON

that was painting an aurora of orange and ruby and shell pink above the eastern wall of the peak on up the stage road that he knew was called the Totem Pole.

With the instinct of the true plainsman, he glanced quickly at the grassy patch on the canyon floor to southward and saw that Nig, his big black saddler, was grazing there, raising his head occasionally to tilt his pointed ears expectantly toward his master.

Everything was as it should be; yet something had aroused him. Vaguely, he seemed to recall having heard human voices, tense, angry, threatening.

He came from under the blanket, slipped his supple legs into his trousers, hauled on his high-heeled boots. He froze to immobility in the act of belting on his twin sixes when on the upper rim and a little to southward gray-black smoke funneled above the waving sage and the report of a heavy rifle set a hundred echoes rolling along the sound-boarding cliff wall opposite.

There was a hoarse cry, carrying hate, fear, agony; a second blaring explosion shook the canyon, then silence. Seconds later, faint from above came the sound of spurred heels stamping over rock footing at a queer hitching tempo that told that the walker was burdened. Then the brush on the rim was parted, and a human body came hurtling down as a log surges down a chute. Almost at the puncher's feet it came to a stop and lay twisted grotesquely—inert as the rocky floor on which it lay.

Silence settled over the upper level. The plume of gray-black smoke lazing above the brush paled, thinned to nothingness in the light air. Two magpies fluttering about the blasted cedar that leaned drunkenly over the brink resumed the querulous chatter they had abandoned when startled by the shooting. Then, shod hooves click-clocked over a rocky trail somewhere up there, receded slowly southward for a little way, then became jumbled into a syncopation that told that the horse was scrambling over uncertain footing.

The camper caught up his bedroll, grabbed his pearl hat off the bush where it had lain, ducked under the overhang, after a hasty glance around had assured him that he was leaving no tell-tale sign of his presence. Peering out cautiously, he saw a man in range dress lead a little powderface cayuse out onto the level, evidently having brought it down by some intricate goat-trail that one would not expect to find on such a rugged cliff wall.

The camper barely had time to note that the other man was young, slim, dark haired, and that he wore a wide-laced buckaroo belt and buffalo hide vest when he released the cayuse's rein and turned back the way he came. For a time the rasp of his heels and soles carried back as he wormed up the steep. Then came the faint squeak of saddle leather as it took his weight, followed by drumming hoofbeats as his horse galloped northward.

THE CAMPER looked the twisted body over quickly. The man was middle-aged, with a furrowed face and short, red beard. He was dressed in a blue flannel shirt and denim breeches. His plain leather holster was empty, indicating that the gun it held was in his hand when he was shot. The right shoulder had been shattered by the first slug, the back of the skull blasted away by the second.

In physical appearance and dress the fellow was an ordinary cowhand of the Wyoming foothills country. But, on his left suspender was a tarnished star stamped deputy, and in his close-clasped right hand were torn portions of three twenty-dollar bills, together with tattered bits of brown wrapping paper on one of which showed particles of red sealing wax.

At sight of the star and the money, the camper grunted his surprise, then built and lighted a smoke and sat down to consider the situation thoughtfully. After his third cigaret, he whistled for his horse, geared him,

mounted and jogged up the gorge toward the stark white Totem Pole around the graveled base of which little heat imps already had commenced their day-long sun dance. "They call you Doubletown," he muttered abstractedly when the canyon opened, showing a cluster of weather dunned shacks on the plain beyond the rocky spire. "From what I've heard, 'Troubletown' would fit you better, but, Doubletown or Troubletown, here's takin' a whack at yuh."

CHAPTER II

JOBBED

BILL STONEHAM, proprietor of the Elite hotel, was a busy man, though he had but one patron, a shock-headed puncher, who was drinking small beers and practicing masse shots on the pool table in a far corner of the combination office, bar and cafe over which Bill was presiding. Bill was busy because it was nearly eleven, and the boarders would be in at noon. The big circular bar had to be mopped, bottled beer iced down, the two tables made ready for the food Bill's tired wife was preparing in the kitchen. Bill was chuffy, and so addicted to smoking cubeb cigarets for his asthma that his clothing smelled strongly of the drug.

Industrious as he was, Bill took time out to waddle to the window and peer along the single hoof-pocked street when hoofbeats wafted along it from southward. He lingered a moment there after he had recognized the two horsemen as Sheriff Ivy and his deputy, Shorty Hogan. Directly across the street from where the Elite stood was the competing hotel, and Bill always watched jealously when a patron loomed on the horizon. He was strictly out after the business. In fact, the opposite side of the street once had been a separate town—which accounted for its present name—Doubletown.

Bill was back at the bar, toweling it industriously when the shutter door squeaked open and shut, admitting the two officers.

Jim Ivy was big, muscular, domineering. He had a dark furrowed face, the nose being prominent, the muddy eyes slightly crossed. A ready fighter and a relentless one, he had well earned the nickname of "Poison Ivy" bestowed on him many years before by the half-tamed denizens of the ill-famed badlands which lay half a day's ride to the southeast.

The deputy was short, full-bellied, grotesquely bowlegged. His thin lashes were paler than his thatch of sandy hair and the eyes they fringed always looked at the world unwinkingly, from a face that never had been known to register friendship, hatred or any other human emotion.

Both officers were flushed by the heat and their clothing was powdered thickly with fine white rock-dust that told they had ridden far.

Tired, hungry, thirsty patrons. Hopefully Bill leaned over the bar and asked the stock question of the old-time bartender the world over. "Whatchu gonna have?"

Ivy jerked his dusty head at a bottle on the shelf and Hogan nodded phlegmatically. "Looks like yuh two's been takin' a real go-around," Stoneham remarked chattily as he set out the bottle and glasses and commenced chipping ice for the chasers.

"Go-around is right," Ivy growled, crustily. "We been chasin' ourselves in circles 'thout really doin' a damn thing."

Skidding out the frosty chasers, Stoneham nodded understandingly. "Rustlers workin' ag'in, eh?"

Ivy poured, gulped, whanged his glass down on the bar with a disgusted air. "Rustlers, hell! Th' down stage was helt up a little while after it left here late yestidday afternoon, an' Joe Barnes, th' driver was shot all t' hell. Shot all t' hell, I tell yuh."

Ivy poured again, gulped again, banged the glass down again. "This shore puts my tail in a crack. Four stage rob'ries on that canyon trail in six months, sayin' nothin' 'bout that bank crackin'." He looked gloomily at the bottle for a time, then said as one hoping against hope, "We may git our hooks on them dew drinkers, this time, though.

"Yuh see, Shorty an' Sam Peters happent to be in th' hills west of th' canyon, an' they heared th' shootin.' When they located the stage, Sam oozed for th' cut a little ways south so he could slide 'is hawse down an' look things over. Meanwhilst, Shorty fanned it on south like hell a-beatin' tanbark an' stirred up th' country. When Shorty brung me th' word, me an' him sifted sand down th' east rim an' organized th' ranchers an' punchers. Th' cut is covered, an' ev'ry hawse trail down canyon is plugged tight, an' word has been sent to Wigwam, at th' south end. If them robbers rides outa there they'll hafta come through this little ol' cowtown." He tapped the wooden butt of his heavy six, suggestively, and glared through the south window at the twisted trail that led to the Totem Pole and the mouth of the canyon. "I'm waitin' for 'em an' if I kin git my eyes on 'em, I'll—"

Ivy spilled part of the drink he was pouring, and set it back on the bar with an unsteady hand. "Lookee! Damn my hide if a unbranded hombre ain't oozin' up from th' trail now."

TENSION CLAMPED down on the wide, low-ceiled room. Shorty ranged alongside Ivy and the two gaped sourly through the south window. The shock-headed young puncher and Stoneham started to join them, but Ivy ordered them back brusquely. "Bizness as per usual, an' keep yuh trap shut," he half growled to Stoneham. Commencing to sweat copiously, Stoneham returned to the bar and started to towel it with a vigor that threatened to destroy the polish. The puncher picked up his cue and began making a series of wild shots—one eye on the door.

A horse stopped outside and quick, firm footsteps crossed the board walk. The shutter swung and a stranger came inside. As the shutter slapped behind him, he stopped, looking from one to the other of the men who were staring at him.

He was young, lean flanked, sturdy in the shoulders. The wisp of wavy blond hair that cascaded from beneath the brim of his pearl hat and the half smile on his clean cut lips gave a slightly effeminate cast which his square jaw and steady, steel-blue eyes valiantly denied.

His dress was that of a ranch top-hand on a holiday—woolen jeans trousers, blue flannel shirt, black silk neckcloth, picturated boots, cuffs, belt and hatband. His sixes were nickel-plated and ivory-butted and silver conchas glittered on the side seams of his white Angora chaps.

The heavy silence of the place grew oppressive. Stoneham coughed high in his asthmatic throat and drew furiously on his cubeb fag. The stranger looked from one to the other of them with a quizzical smile, then rested his steady eyes on the glowering sheriff. "Well," he drawled, quietly, "why don't yuh go ahead an' say it?"

Ivy's heavy jaw thrust out and his teeth clicked. "Awright, I'll say a plenty, when my time comes. Right now it's yur turn to make chin music.

"What's yur name and where are yuh from and when did yuh—"

The stranger waved a hand in a sweeping gesture. "One question at a time an' they'll last longer." He stepped to the bar and pointed out a bottle and Stoneham set it out.

Ivy's teeth clicked again. "Awright, then, if yuh're so damn p'tickler, I'll give yuh a chanct t' tell yuh lies one at a time.

"What's yuh name?"

"Dale."

"Las' name?"

"Dale."

"Dale Dale, eh?"

"Yeh. Maw an' paw's maiden names was th' same, an' they named me after both of 'em. Makes a funny brand, don't it?"

"Funny 'nuff to be phoney. Where yuh from?"

"Abilene—not th' one in Kansas; th' one in Texas."

"Where'd yuh bed down las' night?"

"Back down th' canyon a ways."

"Th' hell yuh did! Ivy took a long step toward the other and shook a sun-cooked finger close to his face. "Where was yuh when th' stage was helt up an' th' driver kilt?"

The puncher shook his blond head. "Dunno exact—dunno where it was helt up. I met it four-five miles below where I bedded."

"Yeah?"

"Yeh?"

The puncher hooked a heel over the brass rail and half turned his back to the bar to lean against it as though settling himself to enjoy a friendly chat. "Did them holdup wampuses git away with any dinero?"

"Huh! I reckon they gotta plenty. They alluz 'pear t' know when t' hit it.

"I'm astin' th' questions, though, an' yuh're doin' th' answerin'."

Dale drank his whisky, downed the chaser Stoneham had just remembered to set out. "I don't know 'bout that," he said, evenly. "Up to now I've been tossin' out infumation a plenty. I figger it's time fur me to ketch an' let you pitch fur a while."

Ivy's heavy face contorted until he looked his nickname, Poison. "Yeh, I'll pitch a plenty—pitch lead!" he fairly howled, twisting to bring his right hip away from the bar and strike at his holster. "Can't no young dew drinker sashay inta Doubletown an' tell me where t' head in an'—

"Ugh!"

As Ivy's heavy six seemed to leap from its holster into his hooked palm, the young stranger became a blur of motion. The sheriff's six clattered to the floor and spun toward the doorway followed a split second later by the one Shorty had half out of the leather. Both stood gazing stupidly at the stranger and rubbing their knuckles where the swishing barrel of one of his ivory-butted sixes had landed.

BACK BY THE pool table the shock-headed puncher's cue raked the plaster as he leaned it against the wall and hunched for the draw. He stopped the movement, raised his hands with a snap and stood licking his lips fearsomely after a slug from the puncher's gun had rived splinters from the floor beneath his feet.

Dale sidled catlike along the bar to bring all of them to his front and his voice came chill and crack-

ling as new ice breaking in a stream. "Steady as is, everybody that wants to live t' eat dinner! Don't git itchy an' go t' scratchin' yur hips none, yuh two law buzzards! Keep away from that shelf where yuh got yur gun cached, yuh bar-keep feller! If yuh make 'nuther move that I can't indorse, I'll make one corner of hell stink of cubebs!"

The speck-faced clock above the back bar ticked off a full minute while the five men formed an immobile tableau of repressed action, no one moving, no one speaking. The newcomer stood, watchful, alert, evidently studying what his next move should be. The two officers breathed heavily in their angry mortification and the sheriff's trigger fingers twitched metronomically as though he were imagining himself pouring slugs into the man who had defied and humiliated him. Shorty's pale lashed eyes were fixed unwinkingly on the man with the gun, and his face still was an emotionless mask.

A mute statue of neutrality, Stoneham kept both palms pressed down on the bar, not even raising one to wipe away the perspiration that was rivuleting down his anxious face. "Don't want no trouble in here, Ivy," he mumbled appealingly, out of a corner of his loose mouth. The shock-headed puncher's mouth still was twitching the signal that he was a coward—and, therefore dangerous if forced to fight.

Ivy was the next to speak. "Do yuh know what this means?" he grated, scowling till his bushy brows met his mop of hair.

"Yeh, I know just what it means," Dale came back, calmly. "It means that this hotel's gonna be a sloppy red mess if any of yuh lop eared gazabos gits ambitious ideas an' starts projectin'."

Ivy's face grew still darker and his nostrils quivered with the intensity of his wrath. Then he relaxed, cocked an ear toward the front door and grinned derisively.

The shutter had swung, and framed in it stood a slim, dark haired man wearing a wide laced buckaroo belt and a buffalo vest on which was pinned a tarnished star. His right hand fondled the butt of a six and he looked at Ivy, as if asking orders.

The sheriff chuckled throatily. "How d'yuh like that, Dale Dale? Meet my head deppity, Jim Reardon, who's been out wolf huntin' an' got back just at th' right time.

"I'd say yur watch was too damn fast," answered Dale, who was watching the newcomer in the fly-specked mirror of the backbar. "Not makin' any brags, I think I'm fast 'nuff so I got anyway a even break with yuh mud turtles."

The sheriff's heavy chuckle subsided to a lower note when Dale added, "One thing's dead certain. If I go down, a sheriff goes down with me. I got that fixed plumb solid in my mind."

"I found Sam Peters kilt over in th' canyon," Reardon reported, keeping his eyes unwaveringly on Dale. "Reckon this is th' onregenerate saddle tramp that done it. Whoever chilled Sam was camped out there las' night. I stumbled acrost Sam's bronc, first; then I found 'im layin' by a overhang with one arm plumb sausaged an' 'is head awmost shot off. Looks like he went down there t' look things over an' got gulched."

"Damn yuh, yuh'll pay for that," Ivy spat at Dale. "I don't wanta 'rest yuh, now. I'm gonna beef yuh."

"I'm amendin' that program a little," Dale told him, defiantly. "Yur flunkies may beef me, but yuh'll be kickin' on th' floor when they do."

Silent inactivity again! The old wall clock stolidly ticked off the dragging seconds till the suspense became so intolerable that even steel nerved Shorty shuffled his feet uneasily and Ivy's breathing carried to all parts of the room.

THE sheriff must have known that he was marked for death, almost certainly; but he was game through and through. He clamped his jaws hard and his shoulder was hunched for the draw that was to start hissing lead criss-crossing about the room. Then he swung half around and stood with his crossed eyes focused on a door that led into the "parlor" south of the end of the bar.

Two persons came into the room—the first a coppery-haired girl who looked fresh and trim in neat gray flannel riding togs, the second, a middle-aged man, withy bodied, sloe eyed with a personality that was at once unobtrusive and commanding. He wore neatly tailored tweed breeches with a silk vest and black string tie, and a frock coat that matched the trousers was hung over his arm.

Not appearing to notice the taut situation in the room, the girl nodded to Stoneham, smiled in a friendly way and said as she started for the street, "We'll be back a little late for lunch, probably—have some shopping to do."

Whether by accident or design, the girl passed between stony-faced Jim Reardon and his target, jostling him lightly when he failed to give ground. "Lookout, dammit," he snarled, stepping around her. "Ain't yuh got sense 'nuff to see that—"

"Lay off that talk," the man snapped crisply. "I'll have you know you're speaking to my daughter."

Reardon whirled to face him wrathfully. "I don't give half a damn who's dorter she is, no lean-shanked sorrel headed heifer is gonna horn me aroun' an'—"

Too late, the head deputy saw what was coming and undertook to swing his half drawn gun to a level. With an incredibly swift movement, the man had come in on him, his sloe eyes glinting venomously. He made no attempt to draw the gun that showed in a spring clasp holster in his left armpit, but his right hand knotted into a fist and swung. Nothing but the forearm was thrown into the blow but it snapped true to the point of the deputy's beard-stubbled jaw and he fell face downward as though he had been decapitated. Before any other person in the room had had time to recover from the suddenness of his attack and adjust himself to the altered situation the slender man shoved the girl on through the shutter and turned back toward the others, rubbing his white palms together as though to brush something unclean off them. A half smile crinkled the corners of his sensitive mouth as he spoke to the gaping sheriff. "Sorry if I interfered with your program, but that fellow spoke disparagingly of Gracie, and, of course, I had to resent it."

He glanced from one to the other of them, and his half smile showed again. "From what I gather from the appearance of things, it perhaps is well that I did what I did. It seems there was a stalemate here." He jerked his well groomed head toward Dale, and proved that his keen mind had sized up the situation accurately on the instant. "That young man had you ticketed for the Great Beyond, and your deputy had him tagged.

"Dramatic situation, I'd say. What's it all about, anyway?"

"None of yur damn bizness," growled Ivy, who had commenced to recover from his surprise.

The stranger arched his brows slightly. "So? Well then, that complicates things still more." He drew a cheroot from an upper vest pocket, clipped the end off it with slow care. "You landed on one of my great faults, Sheriff," he said, smoothly. "Dipping into things that are none of my damn business is my pet way of amusing myself." The suave voice hardened a little as he went on. "Right now, I'm dipping into this; and I'm calling your attention to the fact that conditions have been reversed. You are between two fires, now.

"Arguing from that standpoint, I again ask you what all of this is about."

"Stage hold-up, if yur dead set on knowin'," Ivy rumbled sourly. "Stage hold-up an' murder, th' driver bein' kilt plumb dead."

"Yes, I know about that. My daughter and I came up the canyon, this morning. Got in here a couple of hours ago.

"So this is a suspect, eh?"

"He shore is—suspect on account he was in th' vicinity an' won't give no good account of his self. Furdermore, he kilt one of my deppities, too."

"And, may I ask if you have arrested him?" There was a note of dry humor in the silky voice that made Ivy flush.

"Not precise, I ain't 'rested him. I was holdin' 'im when yuh butted in an'—"

THE stranger waved the fuming cheroot as though to brush aside what the sheriff was saying. "Never mind what I did — and it looked more like he was holding you. Anyway, you admit that you haven't arrested him, though you're convinced that he is a double murderer and a robber. That's bad — very bad. A murderer and robber should be arrested."

His manner grew suddenly brisk. "As I say, he ought to be arrested. As you haven't done it, I shall have to do it, myself." He opened a flap of the silk vest showing a badge pinned to the inner lining. Stepping to Dale's side, he tapped him on the shoulder. "You're my prisoner, Mister."

The sheriff's heavy jaw sagged. "An' who th' hell are you?"

The faint smile reappeared. "The name is Prescott—Richard Prescott, head investigator for the Wells-Fargo people. I carry a deputy United States Marshal's commission. I'm taking this fellow to Cheyenne."

Ivy's crossed eyes came almost straight as they bulged with excitement. "Richard Prescott! Hell, feller, yuh don't mean yuh're Lobo Prescott!"

"That's what they call me." He faced the shutter and called over it to the girl. "Go ahead and do your shopping, Gracie, but don't be gone long. We'll be riding in a little while now."

Dale made no resistance when the Lone Wolf asked for his guns. "Yuh look like a white man," he grinned, as he unbuckled the belt and handed it over. "So I'd admire t' ride with yuh an' that pretty young lady."

"You're riding with me, and she just happens to be along with me," Prescott corrected him, dryly, then spoke sharply to Stoneham, who had taken his palms off the bar at last, and stood cuffing rivulets of sweat off his low brow. "Better souse a little ice water over this fellow on the floor. He really ought to wake up and take

some interest in these official matters. Then get our horses out and have some lunch served in the parlor. We'll eat as soon as my daughter comes back."

"I'm declarin' myself in on that," Dale told him. "Ain't had even a cup of coffee so far today. My camp was kinda messy an' it spoiled my appetite; then when I eased in here for some chuck, things happent."

Ivy attempted to assert himself. "But, hell! I'm sheriff, an' wanta hold this feller fur—"

Prescott shook his head with finality. "Government mail in that stage, also National Bank money and interstate express. I'm a government officer, and I made the arrest. He's my prisoner, because he's my prisoner!"

"But he c'mitted murder right here in my county."

"Uh-huh, but you didn't arrest him, and I did. Uncle Sam will turn him over to you for trial when he gets done serving time for this robbery thing. That will be forty or fifty years from now, maybe, but it gives you something to look forward to at any rate.

"Come on, fellah. We'll go into the other room and take it easy till we get ready to start."

"Better put th' cuffs on th' geezer," Ivy suggested, helpfully. "He's fighty as a ringtailed bobcat, an' may git inta yur hair."

"That's been tried before," Lobo Prescott remarked, then fell in behind his prisoner, who had started for the parlor, picking up speed when the girl re-entered from the street and preceded them, showing no signs of worry or excitement. Obviously, she had complete confidence in her father's ability to handle any situation in which he might become involved.

"Left-right; left-right, here goes th' happy family," Dale grinned as they turned the corner of the bar. "I'm shore proud an' happy to be headed fur jail where I won't hafta 'sociate with no more jug-headed sheriffs an' fence-creepin' deppities.

" 'Sides that, just look who's helpin' haze me to th' calaboose!"

The girl turned her oval face back over her shoulder to flash a contemptuous look at him from her deep blue eyes. Then she shrugged her shapely shoulders and went on.

CHAPTER III

THE 45-70 AGAIN

LOBO PRESCOTT left the hotel through a crowd of gaping spectators. He was riding a close ribbed dapple-gray gelding that looked a little trail-weary. Dale followed on his black, not restrained in any way, but feeling almost naked without his sixes. Back of him rode the girl on a white Crow pony, and behind, a fat brown pack mule carried an unusually heavy load of provisions and camp dunnage.

Arriving before the hardware store half way up the block, Prescott stopped and slid gracefully out of saddle, giving the girl a side glance and jerking his head toward Dale before going inside.

Dale grinned at her when she swung the filly a little to bring her right side toward him and dropped a slim gauntleted hand to the butt of the heavy six that swung in her saddle holster. "I gotta good notion to make a break," he told her. "It would be a honor to be shot by a pretty girl like you."

"You might try it," she came back sweetly. "I assure you it would be a pleasure to shoot an impertinent smarty like you."

He turned up the collar of his flannel shirt and shivered. "Whew-ee! Th' air shore is frosty aroun' here!"

"It will get hot enough if you try anything," she assured him, placidly. "Father taught me to use this gun before I was ten."

He whistled his surprise. "That's funny. I didn't know that model of a six was twenty years old."

Femininity asserted itself, promptly. "So you judge me to be thirty," she pouted. "I'll have you to know that I'm not yet nineteen."

"S'prisin'," he declared. "Nobody 'ud think a girl could git as mean dispositioned as yuh are in eighteen years."

She was about to lash him again when Prescott's voice was raised inside the store for the benefit of the proprietor who must have been hard of hearing:

"Do you keep forty-five-seventy shells, with black powder?"

"Nope. That's a odd size. Got plenty forty-five-nineties, but nobody aroun' here uses a forty-five-seventy 'cept Shorty Hogan. He's a deppity sheriff, yuh know. Only saddle gun he'll pack is a sawed-off army Springfield forty-five that his dad give 'im. It's chambered to carry seventies, an' I put in a special order fur 'is shells 'bout oncet a year. If yuh want 'em real bad yuh might ast 'im t' let yuh have a few."

"Don't believe I want them quite that bad," Prescott said, dryly, then came out and remounted.

As Prescott was swinging the gray away from the walk to start, Dale stopped him. "Wait jus' a secont. Before this calvycade gits to goin', I gotta 'nouncement t' make, which is that yuh're one keen son-of-a-gun, if I'm any judge of hawse teeth."

"You haven't got exactly a mosquito mind yourself," Prescott told him, then started the gray into a jog and they moved up the hoof-pocked street, and northward on the winding stage road, the tamping hooves of their mounts patting up little dust puffs that quickly became an annoyance to the riders.

"I b'lieve I got it on yuh, now," Dale twisted about in saddle to say in an aside to the girl as Prescott rode silently ahead. "If I sass yuh some more I don't b'lieve yuh'll talk back much with this dust as bad as it is. It 'ud be a shame t' git that mouth of yours all gummed up."

"I wouldn't talk to you any more than is necessary even if it were not dusty," she told him, then added, wickedly, "I converse only with high-class persons."

"Well, I ain't so durn p'tickler as all that. C'mon, le's talk."

Disdaining to reply, the girl drew her white silk muffler over her lower face with an eloquent gesture that suggested it was fully as much to stop conversation as to fend out dust. Prescott proved that he had overheard the bit of byplay by turning in saddle to show his whimsical smile. "You mustn't take it too hard if Gracie quirts you some with her tongue, Cowboy," he said, eyeing her dour face teasingly. "You know the 'Lord chasteneth whom He loveth.'

"Gracie's a whole lot that way, too. If she talked real sweet to you, I'd know she hated your intestines. The way it is, you can figure she—"

She dropped the silken rag from her lower face, her blue eyes blazing, "Shame on you! You're the meanest father any girl ever had! I oughtn't to ride another yard with you!"

"What did I tell you?" Prescott chuckled to Dale. "See how she wallops me? And there never was a girl

that thought more of her old dad than she does.

"But we'll put that tomfoolery aside, now." He reined in where the trail crossed a rock outcrop and forked. Taking Dale's belt from where it was looped about the horn of his saddle, he extended it, pointing to the left-hand trail. "That's the quickest way out of the country."

DALE looked at the belt, but did not reach for it. "I'm arrested," he drawled, with a side glance at the girl. "I kinda wanta stay that way."

Prescott's clean-cut face sobered. "Take your guns and go. I know as well as you do that you didn't hold up that stage. Whoever did hold it up shot that deputy. That lets you out of that, too."

"How do yuh know I didn't do th' job?"

"Shucks! What's the use of asking silly questions? I looked your sign over, of course. You turned out of the trail to let the stage pass at least five miles up canyon from where it was held up. You kept straight on to where you camped, and straight on from there to town.

"By the way, I saw that 'dirty mess' at your camp that spoiled your appetite. You didn't do that job, either."

"Guessin' at that, ain't yuh?"

"Not any. That deputy fellow must have bled a lot, but there was only a little blood where he lay, so I knew he had been shot somewhere else and planted there. Bronc taken down in there and left, too.

"So, I climbed up to the rim afoot to look things over and rustled around in the bushes till I found one slug and two empty shells. The shooting was done by someone who carries a forty-five-seventy, using black powder."

"An' yuh figger somebody was makin' a alibi fur themselves by plantin' that body on me, eh?"

"No. They thought they were planting it on me. You happened along just in time to get your foot in it good and plenty."

"I see. An' why didn't yuh leave me with my foot in it?"

Prescott frowned thoughtfully over the question for a time, then he shook his well-groomed head. "We'll just have it that I helped you out wholly because I knew you were innocent. If I had another reason—"

He smiled enigmatically. "Well, Cowboy, they call me 'Lobo' because I run by myself and keep what I know to myself. I think I've said enough, now."

Dale looked up from the cigaret he was rolling to ask abruptly, "Couldn't be that me gittin' into that jam was quite a break for you, could it?"

Prescott narrowed his lids. "What makes you think that?"

Dale fumbled in his vest for a match and lighted, saying past the blazing stick, "Well, f'rinstance, if yuh was scoutin' aroun' this range on th' quiet an' hadta come t' town fur grub, and wanted ever'body to think yuh was leavin' out complete, havin' a prizner t' take along t' Cheyenne with yuh, I'd come in kinda handy—more especial if yuh ain't goin' t' Cheyenne at all."

"What makes you think I'm not going to Cheyenne and that I came for grub?"

"Easy. Yuh bought plenty grub. I heared that landlord grumble 'bout havin' t' pack so much of it.

"Well, a sensible feller that's goin' on th' road travels light, buyin' as he goes. Yuh look like a sensible feller.

"'Course, if yuh're figgerin' on campin' aroun' here kinda permanent-like, that's different."

Prescott looked at Dale, then at the girl. "What did I tell you? I was afraid somebody would notice we bought so heavily."

"Well, if yuh're 'fraid that jug-headed sheriff has got wise, furgit it," Dale said, reassuringly. He wouldn't notice it if yuh'd buy a hull store.

"But we're wastin' plenty time here. Gimme that belt. We kin talk this thing over, later."

Prescott shook his head again. "There isn't going to be any later. I always play a lone hand."

"First time for everything—'specially bein' as I know three of the hombres that helt up that stage, also th' one that kilt th' feller an' th' one that planted th' bronc down there."

Prescott looked a wee bit skeptical. "Big talk, Cowboy."

"I'm backin' it right up. Shorty Hogan kilt th' feller. Jim Reardon planted th' bronc. Them two an' th' dead feller helped do th' robbin', an' he got plugged when they fit over th' money.

"Wait a secont, now. I heared th' shootin', seen th' smoke. It was a big smokepole, shootin' black powder. I heared yuh pumpin' th' storekeeper, so yuh know Shorty done that job.

"I know Reardon planted th' bronc on me, 'cause I seen 'im do it."

"The hell you did—beg pardon, Hon—and what do you think of that? Looks like the entire sheriff's force is in on this thing, eh?"

Dale didn't know about Ivy, and said so. "He's just dumb 'nuff not t' know what's goin' on," he appraised him.

"Well, much obliged for the hunches," Prescott said, after Dale had finished. "It doesn't change anything, though. I hunt alone."

Dale buckled on the belt the other handed to him, and patted the holsters into place with a sigh of satisfaction. "Awright, go 'head an' be a lone lobo."

"Well, good day and good luck." Prescott shook hands and started.

The girl hesitated, then extended her gauntleted palm. "I'm afraid I've been a little rude. I hope you didn't mind."

Dale pressed the hand between both of his strong palms, then called to Prescott, "Ooze 'head ol' timer an' do yur lone wolfin'. Yuh hunt by yurself an' I'll hunt with her."

Prescott turned and shook his head. "Nope. Nothing doing."

"Well, it'll be plumb easy t' git rid of me," Dale told him. "All yuh gotta do is to shoot me."

"Don't fool yourself," the girl told Dale when he ranged the black alongside her filly. "Father means what he says. He won't let you go with him."

"Ain't goin' with him. Goin' with you. He just happens to be along."

THEY followed the stage road for another mile, then swung straight westward where hard footing would leave no trail. For an hour, they plodded on, with the land rising steadily and growing wilder by yards.

They swung south, following a bridle path that held to the left bank of a white watered little creek. After another hour, Dale saw the Totem Pole looming stark white, almost due east of them and knew that they were doubling back to the upper level where the shooting had occurred, that morning.

Something—he never knew just what—caused the puncher to rein in and glance back down a rugged hillside up which they just had climbed. There was a puff of black smoke behind the bole of a big cottonwood beside the creek, the angry hum of a

heavy slug, followed by the sound that, once heard, never is forgotten —the sullen, spat-chug of lead drilling flesh and bone.

Dale whirled and looked ahead. Prescott's gray had stopped, turning its head to look questioningly back at its master, who had dropped the rein and was clinging feebly to the horn, his head slumped, shoulders drooped. "Serves me right. I ought to have known enough to watch my backtrail," he muttered, feebly as Dale spurred the black up beside the gray and caught the swaying man to ease him to the ground.

After they had laid him on a bed of pine needles, he smiled faintly up at Dale. "You win, Cowboy, after all. It seems the lone Lobo has gotten to where he has to have someone to look after him."

The smile died away. The eyelids fluttered down. The supple form relaxed. "Is he dead?" the white-faced girl whispered hoarsely as she dropped down beside him.

Without answering, Dale opened the shirt, ran an explorative hand about the neck and upper chest, bringing it away, bloody. "Collarbone nicked, shoulder an' neck muscles gashed bad by a slug that was so heavy it liketa shocked th' life outa 'im," he diagnosed, quickly. "Git that little bandage roll an' liniment outa my saddle pocket while I rip 'is shirt off! We gotta hurry! He's plumb leaky, as is!"

Prescott's eyelids fluttered as if he were parting them with an effort. "It's no use, Cowboy," his voice came weakly. "I'm hit hard, and can't stand a ride. They'll get us within twenty-four hours, if we stay here.

"Just leave me and get Gracie out. A fellow who doesn't know enough to watch his backtrail isn't worth—isn't worth—"

He gave a tired sigh and his clean-chiseled face became a still, pallid mask.

DALE felt every drop of blood in his clean young body surge with hot wrath while he was cleansing the awful gash, sluicing it with fiery liniment and dressing it as securely as he could. He would have been still angrier if he could have looked around the bend of the trail and seen Shorty Hogan kneeing his wiry little brown bronc townward. He had balanced the 45-70 across his lap while he laced up a husk cigaret. He had just lighted it when he found himself face to face with Sheriff Ivy, who had turned his lean polka dotted white gelding across the trail and sat in saddle eyeing his deputy none too favorably.

" 'Lo," Shorty greeted, reining in. "I'm kinda s'prised t' see yuh."

"Shouldn't wonder an' yuh are," Ivy answered, ironically. "Fact is, it's a wonder that yuh could see anybody out here, bein's yuh was s'posed to be out east of town. I'm astin' yuh how come? Also, what was yuh crackin' down on with that cannon, a bit ago?"

"Started east, but worked over this way, playin' a hunch. Shot at a rock rabbit, but th' son-of-a-gun got away. Comin' back at yuh, what brung yuh over here?"

"Saw yuh kinda lazin' along an' follered yuh," Ivy told him, bluntly. He scratched his thatch of sandy hair with a puzzled air. "Seems like they's a few things goin' on aroun' here that's got me kinda bogged down, mental."

Shorty looked at the glowing tip of his cigaret, his pale-lashed eyes half closed. "Can't be that them there remarks indicates that yuh're anyways suspicious of me, can it?"

Ivy was slow in answering, "Wal,"

he said, dubiously, after a time, "I dunno's I'm what a feller might call out an' out suspicious of yuh. Still I can't get a loop on a reason fur a few things that's happened of late, an' I'm—"

"Look out! They's a black wasp buzzin' aroun' yur head! Git 'im, or he'll sting hell outa yuh!"

Ivy ducked his head to the horn and commenced slapping wildly with his hands. "B-r-r-r! Hope I git 'im! A wasp pizens me up same as a rattler would, or a—"

The sheriff's gruff voice trailed off to nothing and he jerked his hands down and clawed at his holster.

Too late! Swinging the heavy rifle around, Shorty fired from the hip, the heavy slug blasting the sheriff's upper face entirely off. As the officer's body fell heavily to the trail, Shorty started his bronc on, chuckling mirthlessly. "What I call a perfect set-up, all around'.

"Sam Peters got t' hollerin' 'bout his cut of th' dough bein' too little, so I beefed 'im an' took his share away from 'im an' laid it onta that smart young saddle-whacker that calls hisself Dale Dale.

"Then this Prescott gotta wolfin' aroun', headin' fur our hide-out, so I beefed him, an' it'll be laid off onto Dale, 'cause he was with 'im, an' a prizner.

"Now this damn gnat-brain gits half wise, an' I hafta down 'im, too. Well, Dale done it.

"Perfect set-up. When th' sheriff don't come home t'night, me'n' Jim Reardon 'll come out an' find th' bodies. Then we'll git a posse an' rope this Dale feller an' hang 'im higher than th' price of pork in ol' Geeruselum."

He rode on thoughtfully for a little way, then laughed mirthlessly again. "There's that damn girl yet. I gotta ketch 'er an' beef 'er when I git good an' ready—or she'll talk an' clear th' feller. That'll be laid onto him, too.

"I orter like that saddle tramp. He shore does make me a handy alybi."

CHAPTER IV

WOLF PACK

AFTER ungearing the tired beasts and picketing them in a glade a little way off the trail, Dale spent the long, sultry afternoon scouting the vicinity of their stopping place and consulting with the girl—who scarcely left her father's pallet for an instant.

Dale learned that Prescott had been about to retire and disliked doing so without clearing up the series of stage and bank robberies that had been committed within a radius of thirty miles from Doubletown over a period of years. As it was to be his last trip out as an officer, the girl begged to be allowed to accompany him, and he had consented, reluctantly. "It's a big gang," the girl said, "and we know now that three of Ivy's deputies were members of it.

"Their headquarters is located somewhere in the badlands west of the canyon. We know that because when the stage was robbed north of town, their trail ran south and west to be lost in the hard land west of the Totem Pole. When the robberies were to southward, the trail ran north and west; and, once, when they robbed a bank at Rock Hill, sixteen miles west of here, their sign ran eastward to that same section of badlands. After a job they scatter, meet at their hideout, divide the loot, then scatter again.

"All of the late crimes have been inside jobs, in a way—at least, they have information when heavy money shipments are to be made."

"Reckon this Shorty Hogan is th' leader?" Dale asked, as a feeler.

Seated at the head of the pallet, the girl shook her coppery head. "No, the leader is a big, heavy-bodied man with a gruff voice. He is described as absolutely merciless—kills for the love of killing. His devilish cunning has enabled him to avoid suspicion, though Father has given more attention to this gang than any other he ever dealt with. He never closes in on a gang until the leader is known. 'Smash the head, or you don't kill the snake,' is his motto, but he just can't spot the head of this snake."

"He'll git ketched sooner or later—they all do," Dale consoled.

She looked down at Prescott's ashen face, listened to his catchy breathing. "Just now, I'm not interested in catching robbers," she said, wearily. "I'm afraid that, so far as we are concerned, the robbers win."

Dale patted her trim shoulder reassuringly. "Chin up, girl! We ain't licked yet."

"But we can't move him far without killing him, even if he has a chance, otherwise."

He patted her shoulder again. "Wait an' see. I'll admit that he couldn't stick a hawse none, but they's more ways then one t' skin a cat.

"Right now, yuh lay down there an' git yuh a nap. Yuh was in saddle most of las' night, an' first thing yuh know, yuh'll be in worse shape than he is."

AFTER some urging, the girl lay down near her father and Dale axed down and trimmed two slender ash poles. Interrupting his labors by frequent scoutings in the brush, and visits to his patient, he had completed a stout pole-and-blanket litter by the time dusk purpled the lower ground and shaded the upper levels. Just before daylight faded, he robbed a half-dozen brown thrushes' nests he had spotted during the afternoon. With the eggs and a can of condensed milk, whisky and sugar he concocted fairly good egg-nog, doses of which he spooned down his patient at half-hour intervals. When the stars commenced twinkling in the blue ceiling, and a full moon had transformed the Totem Pole into a great incandescent needle, he spread a light lunch and roused the tired girl.

While she was eating, he brought up the stock. After repacking the stores on the mule, he saddled the horses, then, with her help, rigged the litter by passing the poles through the stirrup straps of his black and Prescott's gray. After they had led the two saddlers up and down the trail a few times to accustom them to the novel hitch, they lifted the insensible man into the litter and started, the girl ahead on her white pony, and leading the gray. Dale walking by the black's head. The docile packmule earned his everlasting gratitude by following, patiently.

"Easy's th' word," Dale cautioned her. "Yuh know th' way, so head fur yur campsite."

"I can't say that I could follow the trail by night, but the horses know it," she said, more cheerfully than she had spoken for hours.

"Bully! A human might git bumfuzzled at night, but a hawse won't. Jus' let 'em amble along slow, an' stop when yuh hear me whistle. We gotta look after yur dad ev'ry little bit."

Her voice was a little catchy. "Do you really think that there's the slightest chance that he'll live through this?"

"Yuh never can tell," he evaded.

"One shore thing is that they ain't th' slightest chance that any of us 'll live long of we ain't hid away 'fore morning.

"Them gazabos back at Doubletown know we're out here, an' wolves alluz guards their dens."

WITH the white pony seeming to float wraithlike ahead, and the faithful mule an ebon splotch in the gloom behind, Dale convoyed his little caravan to the upper level then westward into a crazy jumble of rock washes and jagged boulders.

It was a muscle-trying, nerve-wracking trip, with the ease of his limp patient always uppermost in his mind. When they came to a sharp decline into a black gully, he stopped to shorten the gray's stirrup-leathers and lengthen the black's, to keep the swaying litter level; on the ensuing incline, he reversed that arrangement. Once, when they made a short, sharp turn between two blocks of rock, he freed the black and carried the rear end of the litter around the corner.

Stops were made every half hour and the egg-nog administered to Prescott, who sipped dutifully when his head was raised, then relapsed into his seemingly painless half-coma. Once he spoke, feebly, "Don't do like I did. Watch yur backtrail, when daylight comes."

The towering Totem Pole had receded into the morning mists to eastward when the girl reined the Crow pony into more open ground and across a little boiling creek fringed with willows and alders. On the far bank, she turned down stream, calling back a little hysterically, "We're about there, Mr. Dale! I can see the little cottonwood grove where our camp stands!"

Within another minute they were in a circular opening in the timber, and Dale saw a little brown tent and the ashes of recent fires. Reining in, the girl slid down and came back to where he stood looking the hideout over curiously. She caught his hand impulsively and pressed it between her two soft palms. "I've known you less than a day," she told him, tremulously, "but I always will love you for what you've done for Father, this night."

"Thet there word love is a plumb mouthful," Dale told her, teasingly. "Some day I'm gonna make yuh take it back or prove it. Right now, yuh're some excited an' plumb shaky, so I ain't gonna hold yuh responsible when yuh say crazy things.

"Wait till yuh git rested up an' in your right mind; then we'll see if—"

"We must get Father into the tent," she interrupted, hastily. Even in the half light he could see that her oval face was flaming.

AFTER Prescott had been undressed and made comfortable on a clean cot in the tent, Dale picketed the stock and they ate a cold breakfast. Then Dale walked back for a mile beyond the creek crossing, circling frequently to cut their backtrail without showing himself on it. It was midforenoon when he became satisfied that they had not been followed and returned to the camp to throw himself on a blanket in the shade of a big cottonwood — asleep before his body had more than touched the blanket. When the girl awakened him at three, as he had requested, he was surprised to find Prescott fully conscious and definitely stronger and easier. After eating again—a hot meal this time as he no longer feared making a dry wood fire —he saddled the black in readiness for a scout of the badlands. Their

den is at least two or three miles southeast of here," Prescott told him. "I know the general location but not the exact spot. There may or may not be any of them there. Sometimes I think they never are there except right after a job.

"Anyway, be careful. The fellow who plugged me is bound to have carried the word back that we are out this way, and they're sure to look us up."

Prescott scowled thoughtfully up at the roof of the tent, then said, "I'm almost tempted to leave out of here and get help and go get those deputy fellows. One of them might squeal."

Then he shook his head. "Nope, we'll stick it out. This is the only job I have on my hands and I'm not going to leave office without doing it up complete—which means that I've got to get the head of that gang. I'll do it, if I live—and I'm going to live."

Dale bent to grip the white hand on the blanket. "That's th' talk, Ol' Timer! I ain't in no rush if yuh ain't. Just take yur good time an' git back on yur feet. Then we'll see what we see when we see it."

"Bob Billings, the express company's agent at Doubletown is a good man and a keen one," Prescott said. "I'll find a way to get word to him in a day or two, telling him what we know. He may be able to find out something more when we head him in the right direction. Also, he can line up some help, there in town.

"Now run along, Son. I'm ready for a good restful nap." He smiled his familiar whimsical smile as he added, "Don't do like I did. Watch your backtrail."

Five minutes later, Dale crossed the creek and followed the chutelike rocky channel which had been the last leg of their journey the night before. After a mile, he commenced systematically working out a succession of rocky drains that cut the chute from either side.

It was slow, tedious work in the rough going, and with loose rubble underfoot and a burning sun overhead. Often he slid out of saddle to climb some rocky pillar or slab and get his bearings. When the day was still an hour old, and he had turned toward camp, he spoke to the black, as is the custom of most men of the open: "Well, Nig, ol' timer, we don't know where them wolves' den is, but we know a hell of a lot of places it ain't. If we foller this system, we'll spot 'em down, sooner or quicker." Then remembering Prescott's repeated admonition, "Stay put now, while I squirrel up that big hunk of limestone an' take one more good look behind."

Swinging down, Dale climbed nimbly to the top of the big limestone block by following a fissure that cut its rugged face. A quick glance to eastward along the chute showed nothing of interest. A chicken hawk spiraling lazily upward on a half-hearted hunt for feathered prey in the desolate region was the only sign of life.

He turned to face his own camp and was preparing to slide down, satisfied, when he stiffened and ducked his head to the level of the big boulder, tucking his body into the fissure as closely as he could.

TO WESTWARD and a little to south of him a half-dozen men were scattered through the shallow lateral drains. At first, he thought that they were working the washes out systematically, as he had been; but, watching them for a time, he saw that they converging on the

main chute in response to hand signals made by a big, massive-limbed man on a rangy bay horse. Even at the distance of a quarter of a mile or more, Dale could see that the man wore a jumper and breeches of baggy blue denim, and a brown hat with an exceptionally wide brim. The thin wisp of smoke from his cigaret made threads of white in the light air, but his features could not be discerned at the distance. Dale gave particular attention to the horse, but it was a common bay, with no markings to distinguish it from thousands of its color and size.

They knotted about the man on the bay, and he appeared to be questioning each of them in turn. One of the last to come was a fellow on a red roan bronc who was easily identified as Jim Reardon.

Quite evidently their leader, the big man started eastward along the chute, beckoning with his hand for the others to follow. When they came jogging on, Dale slid hastily to the ground, grabbed Nig's rein, led him back of the big rock and held a hand over his dusty muzzle until they had jogged past.

The tall puncher climbed to his lookout position again as soon as they had gone on, swearing in exasperation when he found that the wide brim of the brown hat prevented him from getting even a glimpse of the face of the man whom he knew must be the leader of the Doubletown gang.

Then he rose recklessly to his feet to place a thumb to his nose and wriggle his fingers at the departing band. "Got yur brand listed, yuh big-bellied, elephant eared, weasel voiced sandtoad," he chortled, triumphantly, then slid down the fissure, parted Nig's forelock and kissed him solemnly in the little white star above his eyes. "We got 'im, ol' feller—got 'im spotted down as shore as shootin' is shootin'." He cut into saddle, reined the big horse around, turned him into the chute at the steady, distance eating jog that was the good saddler's all-day gait.

Then the drumming hoofbeats of another horse drowned the cadence of Nig's jogging tread, and around a turn of the chute came a little brown bronc whose rider evidently had failed to connect with the gang, and was now hurrying to catch up with them.

It was Shorty Hogan, riding hunched over the horn, the forty-five-seventy across his lap. He reined in sharply at sight of Dale, then relaxed into his customary slouched posture in saddle and came jogging on, his pale-rimmed eyes barely visible below the tilted brim of his hat.

Dale knew that he was in for it if a shot was fired or even a loud shout uttered. The gang still were close enough to come galloping back at the slightest alarm. It was he and Shorty for it. He slowed Nig to a walk, stopping him and turning him crosswise of the chute when the two horses came nose-to-nose.

THE brown bronc stopped, also. Under the shading hat brim, the deputy's somber face was inscrutable as ever. "'Lo, feller," he greeted, releasing his hold on the rifle and holding it across his lap while he rolled a cigaret. "I reckoned yuh'd left outa th' country fur good."

"Sorry to disappoint yuh," Dale told him, "but th' fact is I figger yuh'll leave this range before I do. Pretty soon now, Doubletown is gonna quit bein' a beddin' down place fur low-down, fence-creepin' dry-gulchin' stage-robbin' gazabos."

Shorty lighted his cigaret and looked at its glowing tip. "Can't be that them there remarks indicates that yuh're anyways suspicious of me, can it?"

"Suspicious ain't th' word," Dale told him, coolly. "I know damn well yuh're lower than a snake's second stummick, an'—"

"Look out!" Shorty called, sharply. "They's a black wasp buzzin' aroun' yuh head! Git 'im, or he'll sting hell outa yuh!"

Dale smiled his contempt. "Yeah? Well, if yuh swing that smokestick even a part of a inch further in my direction, somethin' 'll shore be buzzin' aroun' yuh head an' it'll sting hell outa you.

"Let go of that murder gun, now! . . . Thats' it, just let it fall . . . Now th' belt— Steady, don't make no quick motions . . . Let 'er drop —let yur rein drop, too, till I git down an' gather up this hardware . . . Remember, if yuh try anything that 'll be yur funeral — an' they'll shore be one."

Thirty minutes later, Dale hazed the glowering deputy into the little brown tent where Prescott lay propped on pillows, smoking a cheroot. "Well, Boss," Dale said, cheerfully, "I watched my backtrail, an' this is what I picked up. Shall I scalp 'im before I hang 'im, or afterwards?"

"No great difference which way you do it," Prescott answered, indifferently, then yawned and added, seemingly as an afterthought, "For the time being, just hogtie him tight and let him lie over there where I can keep my eye on him. I want to make a close study of the world's meanest human, for an hour or two. Then we can have a nice, quiet little hemp stretching."

Dale stepped nearer the cot and grinned broadly down at the man on it. "While yuh're studyin' that skunk, roll this aroun' on yur tongue: I know th' head bull of this bunch of lop-ears."

Prescott almost rose from the pillows in his excitement. "Wha-a-a-t?"

"I was sayin' I got a loop on th' name of th' onregenerate renygade that heads that canyon gang."

"Sure of it?"

"Uh-huh." Dale leaned over and whispered a name into Prescott's ear.

Prescott started in surprise, but composed himself, after puffing furiously at the cheroot for a little while.

"That makes things different, then. We'll let this beast hang legally, along with the others.

"We'll break camp in the morning and head for Cheyenne, taking the gully-snake along with us." He waved a pallid fist in the direction of Doubletown. "But we'll be back, soon, and if ever there was a raid that was a classic, this is going to be another like it!"

"But are you sure you'll be able to travel?" asked the girl, who just had come in, attracted by their excited voices.

Prescott jerked his head in decided affirmative. "Hell yes—beg pardon, Hon— I could travel from here to Borneo, I feel so coltish."

She looked from dour-faced Shorty to them. "But I don't understand. What's it all about."

Prescott laughed aloud — something he rarely did. "It means that Dale there has found out more about this gang in three hours than we have in three months. He's spotted the leader."

An interested listener, Shorty

Hogan weakened. "If yuh fellers'll 'gree to help git me off easy, I might turn state's evidence an' up an' tell —"

Prescott cut him off brusquely, "You needn't tell anything, you salmon-eyed yellow belly, and you needn't try to make a deal, either.

"From now on through, we're running this show to suit ourselves, eh, Dale?"

CHAPTER V

SHOWDOWN

TWO WEEKS after the date of the robbery, Bill Stoneham roused from his late afternoon doze in the leather cushioned armchair by the icebox and waddled behind the bar when Bob Billings, the express agent, came in, carrying a double-barreled shotgun and wearing a broad canvas belt looped full of cartridges. "Goin' to war?" Stoneham asked, coughing asthmatically as he set out the small beer which he knew was all Bob ever took.

"Going grouse hunting soon as the stage comes and goes," Billings explained. "Young birds 'll be out feeding, just before dusk." He drank his beer and left for the stage office, north of the hotel. Looking through a side window, Stoneham noted that the agent leaned the shotgun by the door of the low-roofed station and went inside, still wearing his belt.

Stoneham yawned, coughed wheezingly again, hastened to light his inevitable cubeb cigaret. He was chipping ice into the metal box around the beer pipe when two strangers rode in from the north, disappointing him grievously by dismounting before the hotel on the opposite side and disappearing within. Money loving Stoneham noted regretfully that the strangers looked like prosperous ranchers whose custom would be something worth while. His mood became more hopeful when the stage coach creaked and rocked into sight down the dusty, hoof-cupped street and he noted that it carried three passengers—all males, therefore potential patrons.

Black disappointment again. When the driver reined the four sweat-pasted grays to their haunches and set his brake, the three descended, looked questioningly right and left, then crossed and entered the other place of refreshment.

While the express and mail were being unloaded and the horses changed, Sam Reardon lounged in, wearing the Sheriff's badge that had been his since Ivy's death, and accompanied by his head deputy, a big swart man named Jake Stoll.

"Heard anything from Shorty?" Stoneham asked as he set out their whisky and started chipping ice for the chasers.

Reardon shook his head. "Never 'spect to. To my way of thinkin', it's a cold cinch Shorty run acrost that damn yaller-headed Dale somewheres out there in th' rough, an' Dale was a little previouser with 'is hawglaig than Shorty was with his long gun."

"Tough," Stoneham commented. "Shorty was a handy man t' have aroun'."

"Oh I dunno," the new deputy said, a little miffed. "He wasn't th' only real guneroo on this range."

"He come damn near bein'," Stoneham insisted, then left off toweling the bar to watch hopefully as two of the strangers emerged from the place across the sandy street and started to cross. Subconsciously, Stoneham noted that one of them walked rather gingerly and that his

left arm hung straight and pressed against his body, instead of swinging with his stride, as a normal arm does. Interested as he was, he took his puffy-lidded eyes off them to crane his thick neck and scowl toward the hall that led back toward the diningroom and kitchen.

Slippered feet scuff-scuffed along the hall toward the front and a woman's shrill voice rose in angry expostulation, "Here, yuh feller! Yuh cain't go this-a-way!"

Mrs. Stoneham's thin, calico-clad figure appeared in the doorway, then was shoved aside and a tall man stepped past her, stopping within three feet of Stoneham.

The room became as if a bolt of lightning had struck every man in it dumb and motionless. It was Dale, and on his leather vest glittered a metal badge that made Stoneham's eyes bulge with astonishment.

"Yeh, look at it—it's gen-oo-wine," Dale informed them, then added, briskly. "I'm here on bizness, an' I'd admire t' have yuh two geezers with th' stars on lay yur hands on th' bar an' look pious."

Somebody moved almost inperceptibly, and it was as if a tiny sliding pebble had started an avalanche into being. With remarkable agility for one of his bulk and lethargic habits, Stoneham leaped for the shelf where his six lay, just as the two officers ducked partially below the level of the high bar and drew.

THE woman shrieked. Stoneham roared out a lurid oath in a full, round voice decidedly different from his customary high-pitched wheeze.

Two guns spoke almost in unison. The mirror back of Dale flew into thousands of fragments that hailed back against the inner side of the bar with a sound like the drilling of a sandblast. Jake Stoll's six chugged into the sawdust at his feet and he commenced walking backward mechanically, each dabbing, hesitant footstep a little shorter than the preceding one, till he struck the front window with a crash and slid slowly to the floor where he lay writhing and groaning, and firing his other six blindly.

His teeth bared in a wolfish fighting grin, Reardon took two slugs in the chest without blinking as he rushed the acrid smoke plumes that rolled above the bar, his own six crackling spitefully. Then, deserted by the fighting lust that had kept him going after the life really had been blasted out of him, he draped his lean body over the bar, his fingers tapping spasmodically on it as his head sank slowly like that of a drowning man.

It was all a matter of seconds, and Dale now whirled toward Stoneham, whose way to the shelf where his gun lay had been partially blocked by the whimpering, cringing woman who had stumbled into his path momentarily. He had banged her against the back bar in the fury of his charge, clutched the gun and whirled half around, when Dale swung his six high and leaped, bringing the butt down in a short, swift arc.

The fight was over. Stoneham folded joint by joint and lay a sprawled, insensate hulk in the sawdust. Reardon remained draped over the bar, still breathing spasmodically, but no longer able to so much as wriggle a finger. Jake Stoll had emptied his six and was gamely trying to throw out the empties with one shaking hand and fumble fresh loads from his belt with the other. The three supposed ranchers who had

crossed the street came in with a rush, the leading one stopped just inside the door to flash a glance around the powder-fumed room and smile apologetically. "We must have been a little slow, Son—or you were a little fast?"

"Couldn't wait fur yuh," Dale told him, reloading his hot six and slipping it back into its holster. "Run up against th' ol' woman back there an' when she c'menced yelpin' I hadta do my do then or never."

Prescott looked the two deputies over judgmatically, "Well, I see you made out all right with these two. How about Stoneham?"

"Thumped on th' head, an' 'is light is out, temporary," Dale grinned, sobering when he thought of the cringing woman. He took her gently by the arm and started propelling her toward the hall. "Don't take it too hard, Ma'm. I know it's tough on yuh, but yuh gotta keep yur nerve an'—"

"Tough, hell," she screeched out unexpectedly, wrenching her arm free and glaring resentfully down at Stoneham, who had commenced levering his squabby body to all fours. "I told that big fathead over an' over that he better resign as boss of th' gang an' draw out of it complete before 'is luck broke!

"But he was too stubborn and too greedy—jus' couldn't pass up th' money.

"I hope yuh hang 'im higher than th' top of th' Totem Pole!"

OUTSIDE, a shotgun blared defiantly, sending a hail of whistling buckshot diagonally toward the low jail building on the other side, where the other three rancher looking strangers had emerged to the center of the street, sixes in hand.

"Ride herd on this big wampus while I go see what's goin' on," Dale said making for the open.

At the door he almost collided with Bob Billings, who had come in, grinning happily. "Nothing doing out there. Reardon's other deputy was yelping for the gang and trying to rally 'em, but he understood what old Betsy here said and quit in time. They'll never rally, now that you've got these three."

He patted the gun affectionately, leaned it against the bar, then pointed a finger at the slowly rising Stoneham and said to Dale. "One thing I wanta know, and I wanta know it right now:

"How in the heck did you ever come to suspect that big whining wheezing pious-faced penny pincher of being the old he robber and gulcher?"

"Easy," Dale chuckled, as he assisted the dazed, limber jointed Stoneham to his feet. "I didn't get to see his face when I spotted 'im that time out there in th' badlands, but I heard 'im cough, an' I ketched a whiff of th' cubeb fag he was suckin' at when he passed by where I was.

"I never knowed before that asthmy was a fatal disease—but it's gonna be, in his case."

THE town quieted quickly. Guided by Bob Billings, the four special deputies who had posed as ranchers took charge of the jail, locking the deputy sheriff there in one of his own cells, and penning the half dazed Stoneham in another. The county board held a five-minute session, naming Billings as temporary sheriff, to serve "until Stoneham has been hung," as Billings insisted upon having the minutes show.

Having overseen everything and satisfied that law and order had been entrenched firmly in the community,

Lobo Prescott hired a livery team and prepared for a thirty-mile drive to the railroad and on to Cheyenne. "I'm proud of you, Son," he said to Dale, as they shook hands at parting. "I'm proud of you a plenty and I don't want this to be good-bye forever or anything like that. You stuck your head into Hell's hot corner, and made the Devil and his imps like it.

"I'm retiring, next week—going to my little ranch in the foothills country to take it easy. I'd be tickled a plenty if you'd come out there and rod the ranch for me, while I fish and hunt and talk politics with the neighbors."

He gave Dale a side-glance, then showed his whimsical smile as he added, "Fact is, Son, making you manager and foreman wasn't entirely my idea. Gracie says it has to be done, and when Gracie says a thing has to be done, that thing just naturally has to be done. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yuh're damn tootin'," Dale answered enthusiastically. "What she says goes with me—now an' from now on."

SISSY STUFF?

You Think Cowboy Romances Is Sissy Stuff? Don't Be Silly!

Just take a gander at this. It was taken right out of "Gun Girl of the Owlhoot," a hell-roaring novel of frontier days by Larry A. Harris in the February issue of

COWBOY romances 10¢

ALL THE ACTION AND ROMANCE OF THE WEST

NEAR THE door, the four men watched her. Colson began unbuckling his great coat. Beneath the brim of his white Stetson his black eyes shone with killer's lust. His yellow teeth came past his lips. The gambler's veil had dropped from Colson, revealing his stark, ugly passions.

"I've waited two years for tonight," he rumbled throatily. "Two years. . . ."

He tossed his coat to the floor, looked significantly at Blackie who leaned against the closed door, the two guns gripped in his fists. Outside the wind wailed around the corner of the hut. Banker Matt Gregg stood like a stricken man, his slack-muscled face white. In his bulging eyes were fear, puzzlement. Near him stood slow-witted Sheriff Sellers, watching.

"Time to go to work," said Colson.

"I'll kill 'em," Blackie said flatly.

Sellers came to his senses then. "What does he mean, Colson? What's the meanin' of all this? I thought—"

"Yo're not s'posed to think, Sheriff!" Colson grated.

"Thought yuh just wanted me to fetch Nan an' young Durkin here for safe keepin'!"

Colson moved with the lightning-like speed of a springing cougar. Fast for his bulk. He tore the two guns from Sellers' holsters, jammed them into his own belt. Sellers screamed like a woman as Colson shoved him back against the wall.

But Sellers leaped to his feet again, pointed a trembling finger of accusation at the big gambler.

"Yuh can't do this, Colson! Yo're drunk—or loco!"

"Neither, Sellers—yuh thick-witted fool!" Colson sneered. "Me'n Gregg are just playin' a little game."

Fat, squatty Matt Gregg, the banker, brushed a pudgy hand across his face. It was cold in the shack, but the sweat beaded his forehead. His loose lips fell apart. The terror that was gnawing into his vitals shone in his bulging eyes.

"Colson," he croaked huskily. "I can't go through with it! I can't! I can't see yuh kill them in cold blood!"

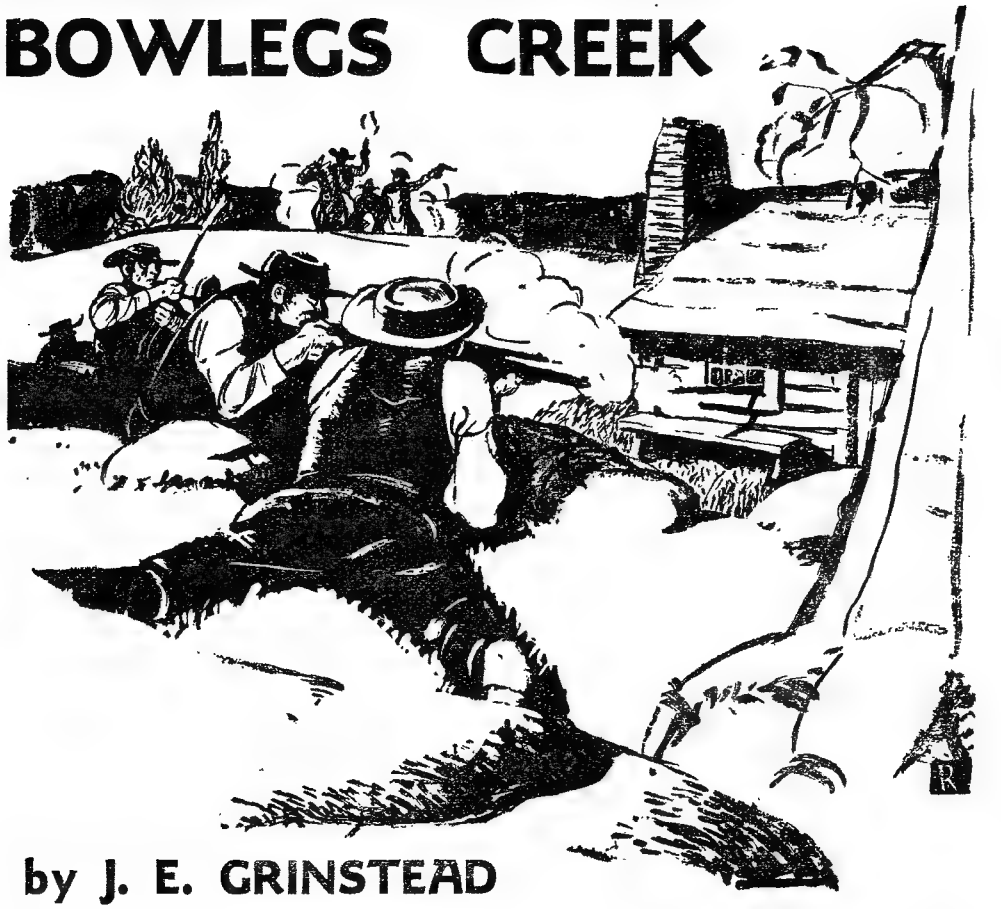
"I'm goin' to kill you, too, Gregg."

AND LOTS MORE LIKE IT

ALL STORIES NEW!
ALL STORIES COMPLETE!
Feb. Issue Now on Sale

10¢ PER COPY

SADDLE WAR ON BOWLEGS CREEK



by J. E. GRINSTEAD

The Day Homestead on Big Bowlegs Creek looked like a hopeless proposition until Clell Berry started to investigate — then it became a very lively one indeed.

"ALL out!" called the foreman of the grading outfit, as he stood on a little eminence overlooking the laboring teams in the long railroad cut.

Instantly, the trained mules stopped in their tracks, some with scrapers half filled, others with scrapers half dumped, and answered the welcome call with a prolonged bray. Hurriedly, the dust-covered, sweating teamsters unhitched their teams, and rushed away to the nearby construction camp. There, they washed their faces in tepid water that had been hauled from the nearest water-hole in a wooden tank, and prepared for the noonday meal of beef and beans and coffee.

It was only April, but already the sun was bearing down like August. Hot puffs of dust-laden wind came up from the great desert that lay to the south. The snow caps on distant mountains aggravated the mind, without relieving the bodily discomfort of the men who were building a railroad through the heart of Ari-

zona, to connect two great transcontinental lines.

Clell Berry raised the water from one of the battered basins on a long bench, and dashed it over his sun-browned face and neck. Then, when he had dried his face and hands, he picked up a twisted piece of brush and beat the white dust out of the folds of his sweat-stained shirt, before going into the mess tent. By a hundred little acts, all of which Clell seemed trying to hide, he showed that he was with, but not of, the miscellaneous crowd required for frontier railroad building.

The fact was, Clell Berry was a gentleman. Not by special training for the part, not because of his lineage—though it was good enough—but naturally born a gentleman. A man who, even when he fought, and he sometimes had to fight, did it in a gentlemanly, fair, clean manner.

Clell was nearly six feet, broad of shoulder, and his sober gray eyes looked out straight from beneath heavy sandy brows. A thatch of crispy, reddish brown hair, lightened by alkali dust and the lack of a barber's attention, covered a well shaped head. The sun and dust and wind, together with a naturally good-humored disposition, had put little nests of permanent wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. Just now, there was a look of seriousness in Clell's gray eyes, as he avoided the jam and rush of men going into the tent, and waited quietly until he could enter like the gentleman he was.

The reason for the serious look was that Clell was about to undertake an adventure of which he could see only the beginning and couldn't even guess the end. He was quitting the construction company for two reasons. One was that if he stayed on the job he would have to whip Buck Spradley. That, indeed, would have been a rather pleasant task if it had been merely a matter between him and Spradley, for Buck needed a trimming. But Mr. Spradley owned three teams which he worked on the grade, hiring his own teamsters. Clell knew they'd gang on him, and he also knew he wasn't rough enough for the other men to take his part.

The main reason for his quitting, however, was that he had been working steadily on the job for more than a year; it was a dog's life to him, and he'd had enough. Besides that, he had been thinking. People would come in with the railroad. They would have to eat. A few irrigated acres of land would be a fortune, and he was going to look for land and water that could be gotten together. He would need no engineer to tell him that water would run down-hill. He was an engineer himself. That was what he had come West for. He had found that engineers, like officers in an army, were fairly plentiful, but privates were always in demand, so he had worked in rock cuts, driven teams on grade work, and served a general apprenticeship at railroad building. Now that he had learned the trade, he was quitting to try something else.

Clell wasn't the kind of fellow that would throw down his tools and quit in the middle of the day. He was twenty-eight and thoughtful for his age. He always wanted to be fair. The eight-hour day hadn't been born at that time, so it was almost dark when, the day's work done, Clell Berry went to the foreman's tent to get his time.

As Clell entered the tent, he met a man coming out. The stranger was a tall, slender, sharp-featured man, wearing a long-tailed coat. He greeted Clell with a nod as they met and

passed on. A few minutes later, when Clell came out, placing his pay check in his pocket, he saw the stranger sitting on a boulder a little way from the tent.

"I'd like to talk to you a minute, pardner," said the man and motioned to a seat on the stone by his side.

Clell had never become fully accustomed to the Western custom of being perfectly at home with strangers. He knew there were men who followed the construction camps for the purpose of gambling with the men. This man was clad very much like an itinerant gambler, but he hadn't the right expression in his face.

"Quitting the outfit?" asked the stranger, as Clell took the proffered seat.

"Yes."

"Don't blame you. It's pretty rough. Going back to civilization?"

"No. Thought I'd just stick around and help civilize this country," replied Clell.

"Oh, I see. Joining up with the Rangers, I reckon."

"Wrong again," laughed Clell. "I'm no fighting man. Fact is, I'm still a little bit afraid of the West. I'm going to look for some land that I can put water on and grow things for all these new people to eat. I have an idea—"

"And it's a good one, too!" interrupted the stranger. "I wanted to do that, but—"

The man coughed, and they sat in silence for a full minute.

"Marshall is my name—John Marshall," he then went on. "I'm up against it, hard, and I want to talk to a man that can understand things. I believe you are that kind, and I want to tell you my troubles. It won't hurt you, and maybe it'll help me."

"Go ahead," nodded Clell. "My name's Clell Berry, and I have nothing to do until morning. Then I'm going down to Badger Hole, at the end of the track, draw my pay, and look about a bit."

"WON'T be a long story," Marshall answered. "A year ago the doctors told me to get a wagon and team, come out to this dry country, and rough it. I did, and I seemed to be getting better, but I found out that a man can't keep traveling about without money. I got the same idea about farming by irrigation that you have. I found the place, too, and could have bought the claim for a song, but by that time I couldn't sing a note. I was broke, and looking for something that I could do, to eat. I came down here, thinking I might work my team a while on the grade, but it's no go. I began to cough when I got in a mile of this dust. Then I gave up, decided to sell my wagon and team for enough to take me back to the old home, where I can at least be buried like a Christian."

The man stopped and hung his head in a despondent manner.

"Did you sell your team?" asked Clell.

"No. That's what I was doing in the foreman's tent. He said the outfit wouldn't buy horses at any price, because they couldn't stand the work. If I had mules, he might buy them. The wagon, he wouldn't have."

"That's hard luck," commented Clell, in a sympathetic tone.

"Yes. I've got a good outfit. The horses are Missouri stock. Been out here a year and are acclimated. They're only six years old, and the wagon was new when I started. A fellow that runs some teams on this job, name's Spradley, offered me seventy-five dollars for the two

horses, if I could get rid of the wagon. I'd take it, but that wouldn't get me back to Phoenix, by stage, and buy me a ticket home, to say nothing of anything to eat."

Clell pondered the problem a minute before he spoke.

"If I had enough money, I'd buy your outfit," he said then. "I might raise enough, but there'd be none left for a grub-stake."

"It wouldn't take much to buy it," said Marshall, with a gleam of hope in his sunken eyes. "You could go up on Little Bowlegs, then, and get that claim I told you about. There's about a hundred acres that can be put under water, and there's an ocean of water in Little Bowlegs. Plenty of good pasture land adjoining it, and nobody would ever crowd in, because there's no more farm land on the creek. Just the place you're looking for. I wouldn't tell you, but I can't have it myself. Come, go down to my camp, and look at the outfit," and Marshall rose from his seat on the boulder.

Clell joined him and they walked away together. The stranger had described the very thing that Clell had been dreaming of for months. He had more than enough money to buy the outfit at a reasonable, fair price, but not enough to do that and have any operating capital left. There must be money to pay the shiftless squatter something for the claim, and to go on until a crop could be raised. True, he might grind this poor, sick, broken-hearted wanderer down, buy his team for a pittance, and get by that way. He knew that was one way men got rich in this world, but his decent character revolted at the thought.

As they walked away through the camp, a man got up from behind a great boulder, within twenty feet of where they had been sitting, and went into the foreman's tent. It was Buck Spradley.

A quarter of a mile from the construction camp, they came to Marshall's wagon and the two great, raw-boned bay horses. Clell looked the horses over the best he could in the fading light, caught the spokes of a wagon wheel and shook it to see how badly the thimbles were worn, and then sat down on the wagon tongue, and lit his pipe. A scheme was hatching in his mind, but he wanted Marshall to talk more before he decided.

"Hasn't the climate done you any good?" he asked, between puffs at his pipe.

"As long as I could stay up in the foothills, like the Bowlegs country, I seemed to mend, but as soon as I come down where the alkali dust is, it's all off."

"Wouldn't you like to go back up there?"

"I'd rather be there than anywhere on earth, but I can't live on climate and scenery. Buy my outfit, at your own price. Then go up there and make a fortune. I'd rather have that little irrigated farm than to have any mining proposition in the territory. I'd like to try a lot of things on it that I learned in my four years in college. Botany, horticulture, and agriculture were hobbies of mine."

CLELL smoked in silence. Buying horses from strangers in Arizona at that time was a doubtful enterprise. They might be good horses, but the buyer might also be called on by a party of enraged citizens, who knew but one remedy for horse stealing and carried it with them, coiled at a saddle horn. Marshall didn't look like a thief, nor did he talk like a receiver of stolen goods; still, Clell was cautious.

"I won't buy your team," he said at last. "I—"

"Oh, for pity sake, man!" cried Marshall, with almost a sob in his voice. "I'll take any price you say. I can't work and I don't want to starve. This West they tell about is a great place, and the people are all right. The proportion of good and bad is about the same as in other places—except in railroad camps—but the West is too busy to take care of cripples. It's a fight, out here. A real, he-man's job."

"Oh, I don't know. I've seen some cripples make a pretty good fight, in my time. Using your head in a fight cuts a good deal of ice sometimes. I'm going to make a proposition to you, by which I can't lose and you can eat. You'll know I'm all right, or I wouldn't make the offer, and I'll know you're game, if you take me up on it."

"Good enough! Let's have it."

"I'll go up to the bunk tent, get my dunnage, and put it in your wagon. Then we'll get a little sleep. About four o'clock, while it's cool, we'll head out for Badger Hole. When we get there, I'll draw my money, grubstake the outfit against your wagon and team, and we'll prospect Little Bowlegs together, share and share alike. That's fair."

"More than I ever hoped for!" cried Marshall, grasping Clell's hand. "I didn't want to be a quitter. With a partner like you, I'll stick it out and get well yet."

So were friendships made in the old West, between men driven together by hard necessity. They might, apparently, have little in common, but such friendships often lasted until death. Many a time men have stood with a dead partner at their feet, fighting on, more to avenge the death of a friend, than to protect themselves. Such became the friendship between these two men.

It was forty miles from the construction camp to the claim on Little Bowlegs, twenty-five miles from the camp to the end of the track at Badger Hole, and forty miles from Badger Hole to the Little Bowlegs country. Thus making an isosceles triangle, with a twenty-five mile base and the claim on Little Bowlegs at the apex.

THREE days later, the wagon well stocked with supplies and grain for the team, the partners topped a rise, and Marshall, who was driving, stopped.

"Yonder," said he, "is Bowlegs Creek. There are two of them, Big Bowlegs and Little Bowlegs. Big Bowlegs is dry, except when it rains, which isn't often. Little Bowlegs has a flood of water, from head springs, all the time. You see that the two streams head almost together, curve out like a parenthesis and come together again. It looks like a bowlegged giant, lying on his back, his head in the mountains, his feet together in the edge of the plain, and a ridge of foothills between his knees. That's what the creeks took their name from. This trail crosses just below where the two creeks come together. Half a mile below that point, the water sinks into the sand and disappears. Below that, Bowlegs is a dry gorge, except when there's a waterspout, and then it's a terror."

"Looks quiet and peaceful up there," commented Clell.

"Yes. Only the one squatter in all that country, far as I know, and he's anxious to get away. There's no water between here and the crossing on Bowlegs, so we've got to make it there tonight," and Marshall urged the team on.

Peaceful! Oh, yes. Bowlegs looked peaceful enough; but one old-timer said: "Yep, you kin grow crops awful quick on this Arizony land, if you put water on it. Plumb 'stonishing, but more 'stonishinger how quick men kin raise hell on it—without no water a-tall!"

It was quite dark when, winding through the thick timber that grew along the banks of Bowlegs Creek, the partners heard the welcome music of the gurgling, rushing stream.

"Hullo!" said Marshall. "There's a camp-fire just this side of the creek. Wonder what's up now?"

They made camp at a little distance from the other and started a fire. Pretty soon the other wayfarer came over to their camp.

"Hello, Fiddler! Glad to see you!" cried the visitor, and extended his hand to Marshall.

"Why, why—how are you, Mr. Mosby?" returned Marshall, grasping his hand. "Make yourself comfortable, and we'll have some supper pretty soon. This is my partner, Mr. Berry."

Mosby acknowledged the introduction.

"Much obliged, but I done et," he said. "I'd like to hear you fiddle some after supper, though."

Marshall and Clell went on with their cooking, but Clell was wondering just a little about this acquaintance of Marshall's, in a country where there was supposed to be but one man. Marshall was doing some thinking himself. He was wondering how the owner of that coveted claim in Little Bowlegs came to be camping here below the forks, and presently he asked the question.

"Oh," said Mosby, as he squatted on his heels and smoked his old pipe, "I done sold out my claim on Little Bowlegs. Made the trade yesterday."

"To whom?" asked Marshall with a note of disappointment in his voice.

"Fellow named Spradley. Said he'd been running some teams on the new railroad. Traded me a pretty good mule, to match the one I had, and 'lowed I could get work down there."

"I'm sorry," said Marshall. "We were on our way up to give you a trade for that claim."

"Shucks! You don't want that little old place. I stung that feller Spradley good, when I traded it to him. They's on'y a hundred acres of farm land. 'Sides that, they's a trick in it that I didn't tell you. It lays pretty, there in the bend, and looks like movin' about four shovels of dirt would put water all over it, and it would, just about."

"What's the trick, then?"

"Gravel subsoil and cracks in the rocks underneath that lets the water all out," and Mosby went on to tell the faults of a property he had sold, as men often do, but, unlike many others, he was telling the truth.

"Is there any other farm land farther up Bowlegs?" asked Clell.

"Not on Little Bowlegs. There ain't a patch of dirt that a dog could bed on, from my old place to the head of the creek—just a lot of canyons and crevices and rocks, where a yerthquake or something has plumb busted things some time."

The partners finished their cooking and fell to with hearty appetites and the silence that usually attended eating on the frontier. Mr. Mosby's jaws were not otherwise employed, so he went on talking.

"If you fellows want some real good land, you'd orto go up Big Bowlegs. There's two or three hundred acres up there. Red clay subsoil, good, deep loam, and she lays plumb pretty for water, 'cept they ain't a dang drop of water, only when it rains;

then they's too much. Old Gray Hoss Riley's up there—or was, last time I seen him. He's been there five years, and raised one good crop."

Mosby rattled on until the partners finished eating. Afterward, Marshall got out his violin and blended its music with that of the gurgling stream. He was a dreamer and a rare musician. Next morning the partners were awakened by the rattle of Mosby's wagon, as he broke camp a little after daylight.

"I don't like to give this Bowlegs project up," said Marshall, after breakfast. "If Mosby told the truth, Spradley will be wanting to sell pretty soon. Suppose we take a little trip up Big Bowlegs and get the lay of the country. No use trying to trade with Spradley now."

"Might as well, now that we're here," replied Clell. "I don't want to see Buck Spradley. There's pretty apt to be trouble whenever and wherever we meet. He's a good man, I reckon, but I can't get along with him."

They hitched up the team and took the dim road that led up Big Bowlegs. Ten miles from their camp, they emerged from the boulder-strewn wilderness into a beautiful valley, walled about with foothills. The creek ran almost due south from the mountains, and the valley lay on the east side of it. As Mosby said, there was two or three hundred acres of fine land, but no water. There were two cabins in sight, and a wreath of smoke was curling from the chimney of one.

OLD Gray Hoss Riley was standing in the door of the first cabin they came to, and the old gray bag o' bones that gave him his name was grazing the stunted bunch grass near the cabin.

"Mawnin', gents," called the old hobgoblin, as the wagon stopped, his tobacco-stained whiskers bobbing up and down and giving the appearance of an ancient billy goat. "Prospectin', I reck'n," he went on, when they had returned his greeting.

"Thought we might locate a claim in this section, if we could find a good one," ventured Clell.

"Ain't but three claims in twenty mile that's worth the filin' fee, and they're all took. Mosby's got one on Little Bowlegs, and I got two here on Big Bowlegs. His claim ain't worth a copper-lined damn. Nothin' but water over there. Land's no account."

"How's this land of yours?"

"Best land east of the range."

"Don't seem to be much growing on it."

"Too airly yit. Git our rains mostly in May and June."

"Would you sell these claims?"

"No, sirree! Just suit me to a tee."

Marshall made a movement as if to start the team.

"Hold on, pardner! Don't hurry. I might sell that'n up there that the other cabin's on. I reck'n one's all I need. I'll take a thousand dollars for it, and—"

"And I'll give you a hundred for a quit-claim deed," said Clell.

Anybody but a pair of easy marks would have known Mr. Riley for what he was—a cold-blooded old reprobate, who would rob his grandmother's grave for a penny. He swore and protested that the offer was an insult, but within an hour he had a hundred dollars which was more than he would have given for the whole of Arizona, and the partners had a quit-claim deed, written by Marshall and duly signed, together with the original papers issued by the land office. This title wasn't much as it stood, but if they made certain payments and did

certain things within a specified time, it would be perfect.

They took possession of the cabin, and Marshall began to figure. He was figuring forty bales of alfalfa to the load, and a ready market at $1.50 a bale, at the railroad. He took no account of the fact that when the railroad was built, alfalfa would be shipped in cheaper than that. In the midst of his figuring, while Clell was silently trying to figure out why he bought the claim, Old Gray Hoss hobbled up to the cabin.

"Howdy, gents. Been thinkin' about these claims. You'd orter have one apiece. I'm getting old, and I'd sell out entire, if I got the right offer."

Now, Clell was putting up the money for the enterprise, and had been wondering why he had paid a hundred for a dry claim, where it never rained. Neither of the partners spoke.

"Tell you what I'll do," Mr. Riley went on. "You seem a likely pair of youngsters, that's apt to make something of this valley. I'm too old to work it. I'll sell you the other claim for another hundred."

"No," said Clell, "if it's any good one claim is enough. If it isn't any good, one claim is too much."

But Mr. Riley was no quitter, when he had set his hand to the plow. He came down to seventy-five, then to fifty, and finally offered to take a Winchester rifle and twenty-five dollars, and leave the valley. More for the riddance than for the land, Clell made the trade.

Soon after noon, Mr Riley packed his most intimate belongings on the old gray plug and disappeared into the roughs at the south end of the valley. He had bumped two suckers, and it was not the first time he had done the like with those same two claims.

IN HIS two years in the West, Clell Berry had seen very few safe deposit vaults—except the mountains, where nature had deposited her gold and silver and copper and had apparently thrown away the key. By tacit agreement, he was head of the firm, so he took all the papers in the land deal, folded them carefully, and placed them in his pocketbook. He noticed that the papers from the land office, on which the quit-claim deeds were based, had been much handled, and on one of them there was a splotch that looked like dried blood. He paid it no attention. So the papers reposed in the old leather pocketbook, which Clell always carried on his person.

Clell wasn't crazy, by any means. He was an engineer. He saw at a glance that with very little labor a dam could be built just above the upper cabin, and storm water enough stored to irrigate considerable land. As soon as Riley was out of sight, he picked up the remaining rifle, told Marshall he was going to take a look farther up the gorge, and left the cabin.

It was little more than a mile from the cabin to the head of the creek, but owing to the curve it couldn't be seen. Clell took his way up the gorge, scanning the ground with critical eye. A little way up the stream he came upon pools of water, with lush grass and weeds growing along the banks. Half a mile from the cabin the gorge became a crevasse, with towering walls of stone, and the stream a tiny ripple over the stone bed. By this time, he could see that the gorge ended, apparently, in the side of a mountain, with no way out, except the way he had come in. He went on, and came upon an immense blue pool of water under the overhanging cliffs. A hundred feet above him, a

tiny stream came over the precipice. It looked like a silver rope that unraveled as it came on, until it was a broad tassel of spray by the time it struck the pool and cast a tiny rainbow on the dark blue water. He was spellbound with the beauty of the thing. As he stood, looking in wonder, there was a great roar of water, seemingly all around him.

At last he tore himself away from the beauty spot, searched out a way, and climbed the bluff on the east side of the creek. At the top of the bluff he walked around to where the little stream broke over the cliff, then stopped and caught his breath. The roaring water was not far to seek. About a hundred feet to the west of where he stood was the head of Little Bowlegs. A flood of pure, clear water was pouring through a deep, wide crevasse in the solid stone of the mountains. The tiny stream that flowed into Big Bowlegs was simply overflow from a low place in the stone banks that ran through an age-worn channel to the cliff. From where he stood, Clell could see his own valley, and could see that it was far wider and lower than that of Little Bowlegs. At that point, the head of Little Bowlegs was a straight, stone channel for several hundred feet, as if nature had labored at it for a million years, or some Titan had chiseled an immense chute in the stone. The water was level with the top, and sweeping by with the speed of a railroad train.

Clell turned from it, and started to find the source. He had gone but a little way, when climbing on to a ledge of stone he saw for the first time, the Basin Spring. It was a hundred feet across, and boiling and bubbling like an immense pot. He crept to the edge of the spring, and gingerly put his finger in the flood. It was icy cold! The melting snow of the mountains was finding its way to the sea through crevices and grottoes.

Clell glanced up, and then started as he saw a woman standing on the other side of the basin. She was looking at him, but if she was speaking he couldn't hear her for the rumble of the water. A little way beyond the woman was a cabin. There was a climbing rose by the cabin door, and just above the house, watered by a smaller spring, was a little garden patch and some green alfalfa. Here and there were bright spots where some homely flower bloomed.

Walking around the rim, Clell crossed a brawling little stream that came from above the garden, and emptied into the basin. The woman didn't run away. She didn't seem the least frightened or embarrassed. Just surprised. She was a young woman, little more than a girl, and she was pretty. Clell said, "Good evening." The girl's teeth flashed white between red lips as she returned his greeting.

"Do—do you—" and Clell stuck.

"Yes," laughed the girl. "Strange as it may seem, I do. I live in that cabin, with my father. Won't you come and see him?"

Clell would, and he did. On the way to the cabin he told the young woman his name was Clell Berry, and she told him her name was Jenny Tatum. How else could they be introduced? There was no one else to do it. That part of the West was not very well up on conventionalities.

The house was two big rooms, with a little lean-to at one side. Flowers were growing in every nook and cranny about the place. There was some home-like, gripping thing about this solitary cabin, lost here in the mountains, that Berry couldn't explain to himself just then.

WHEN they entered the cabin, the visitor saw a long-haired, bushy-whiskered old man, sitting by a window, fingering some bits of broken quartz.

"This is my father, Mr. Tatum, Mr. Berry," introduced Jenny.

"Glad to meet you, sir," and the old man extended a gnarled and knotted hand. "Knew a Jim Berry, at Placer City. Any relation of yours?"

"Why, I haven't figured, but—er, that is, I don't know, sir!"

"Yes," said Tatum, a little later, "I been prospecting here in these mountains for twenty years or more. Everybody on the range knows Old Ranse Tatum. Most of 'em knows I got a cabin on the head of Bowlegs, but mighty few have ever seen it. How'd you find it? Prospecting?"

"No, sir," replied Clell. "I bought some claims down on Big Bowlegs."

"Claims? Claims? Why you got flimflammed. There's no mining down there."

"Claims of land," explained Clell.

"Oh, squatter's claims. Why, they ain't worth a whoop. Why didn't you take up that little pocket of land down on Little Bowlegs? Plenty of water to irrigate that. Can't raise anything here without water."

"I was on a trade for that, but another fellow beat me to it."

"What! Another fellow? What's his name? Know him?"

"Yes, sir, I know him. Buck Spradley is his name."

"Huh! This country is getting too thick settled for me. Don't mind having one neighbor, but if they get too thick— Don't matter on Bowlegs, though. I've prospected both branches, clean to the mouth, and never got color. Now, I struck a little pocket, over on the west prong of Hell Roarin' Creek, in '72 I reck'n it was, and—"

"Father, did you know the alfalfa was ready to cut again," interrupted Jenny.

"Reck'n it is. Now, there's something that'll show you what good dirt and water will do in this country, Mr. Berry. Four years ago we built this cabin here at the Basin Spring. Nothing would do Jenny but we must have a garden patch. It raises all the fruit and vegetables we want, and enough alfalfa to feed my saddle mule, Jenny's pony, and two burros. Why, back in '72, or maybe it was the next year, I struck a little pocket over on—"

"Maybe Mr. Berry would like to see the garden, father," interrupted Jenny, again.

"Yes, I expect he would," and reaching for his cane, Ranse Tatum rose and hobbled to the door.

"I limp pretty bad yet," the old fellow said, as they went toward the miniature farm, "but I'm getting better all the time. Pretty soon I will be able to make another round. I was up the range a ways last year, or maybe it was the year before, and fell and busted my leg. Minded me of the time I struck that little pocket, back in—"

"Father, tell Mr. Berry how many times we cut this alfalfa in a year."

Diverted from his "little pocket" again, Tatum told Clell about the hay, and the fruit and vegetables that Jenny grew on the little plot of ground.

"Yes, sir, it is wonderful what will grow on land in this country if you give it water, but Jenny's the farmer," he concluded. "I'm a prospector. Back in '73, or maybe it was '74, I struck a little pock—"

"There's at least another acre of good land here, Mr. Berry," said Jenny, again preventing her father from explaining about that little

pocket, "but I can't get the water on it. It looks lower than the other, but the water won't run that way."

"Well, now I haven't figured, but if I had my instrument here I could fix it for you," Clell said.

"Oh, could you?"

"Yes'm. All you have to do is find out which way is down-hill, and let the water run that way. If you want, I'll bring up my instrument and figure it for you."

"I'd be so glad! That would make me quite a farm."

That was the beginning of their acquaintance. Clell stayed an hour, and at Jenny's invitation promised to come the next day and show her which way was down-hill.

Old Ranse Tatum had tried a dozen times to tell about that little pocket on the west prong of Hell Roarin' Creek, but every time Jenny would interrupt him. The facts were that old Ranse had been out on a prospecting trip three years before. Jenny had been with him. The old fellow had fallen off a bluff and had broken about everything that was breakable, knocking a dent in his head for good measure.

Throughout his fight back to life, he muttered about that little pocket on west prong. He got up again, but was crippled for life, and now he only sat by the window looking at his pieces of quartz and muttering to himself about this pocket. Perfectly rational when roused out of his reverie, but when he had talked a few moments intelligently he would slip a cog and go back to that pocket.

Clell looked again at the mammoth spring and speculated on how much, or rather how little, labor would be required to turn a sufficient amount of that great volume of water into his valley, to irrigate all the farm land he and his partner had. It was the heart of a primitive wilderness. Doubtless this was the first time a trained eye ever had studied the possibilities of the spring as an irrigation project.

Reaching the bed of the gorge by a perilous climb, Clell gave one hurried glance at the beautiful silver rope, which he meant to enlarge until he could climb by it to fortune, and, subconsciously he was thinking of a wonderful woman.

"Clell Berry," he muttered to himself, "you're just about the luckiest man in the world. Lucky in coming to Arizona, in the first place; lucky in meeting up with John Marshall; lucky that Buck Spradley beat you to the claim on Little Bowlegs; lucky that you bought out both of Riley's claims, and—just lucky every way, that's all," and he whistled a merry tune as he hurried on down the gorge.

IT WAS almost sunset when he got in sight of the cabin. He could see only one of the horses and Marshall was not in sight. He sensed something wrong and quickened his pace. He found his partner bound and gagged, on the dirt floor of the cabin. There was a frightful lump on his head, where he had been struck a heavy blow, and he was groaning with pain.

"Who did this!" demanded Clell.

"I don't know," replied Marshall weakly. "After you left, I lay down to take a little nap. When I woke, or rather when I came to, I was bound and gagged and my head was bursting."

Clell forgot the wonderful story of luck that he was going to tell his partner. The first thought that came to his mind, as he removed the gag and unbound Marshall's hands even before Marshall had spoken, was that Buck Spradley was at the bottom of this outrage. Clell, like most good-

natured, fair-minded men, was a terror when he was mad, and he was good and mad now. There was plenty of room in that country for the few people in it, without crowding, and he didn't mean to be crowded. Buck Spradley had found out, in some way, and had come into the Bowlegs country to beat him out of a claim. He had succeeded and ought to be satisfied.

As soon as Marshall was a little better, Clell dug into a pack and got out an old Colt's .45. He buckled it on, grimly.

"Seems like you have to fight for what you get in this country, same as anywhere else," he said. "I didn't want to fight, but if nothing else will do, I'm in."

Marshall tottered over to a battered old grip, and hauled out an old hogleg. He buckled it on, dragged it from the holster, and spun the cylinder awkwardly. It was a piece of comedy to watch him, and Clell laughed outright.

"Oh, I know it's a joke, Clell, but —but—I'll do my best to shoot the next fellow that—oh, hell! I'm not fit for the frontier. Let's hitch up and get out of here."

"Hitch up what? Didn't you know one of the horses was gone?"

"No."

"Well, it's true, and I've been wondering why they didn't take both. Looks like—"

"I know why. Nobody on earth but me can catch Old Seelum, when he's turned loose. I turned them loose to graze."

"Well, here we are. I might put the saddle on Seelum, and try to track the thief down, but it would be foolish. I don't know the country. The thief has got four or five hours start. Guess we'll have to let him go—for the present."

Clell knew Buck Spradley was a bully and a gambler, but never thought of him before as an out-and-out thief. The thoroughness with which the marauder had gone through their effects, after putting Marshall out, didn't escape Clell. There was evidence, also, that Marshall's pockets had been gone through, but not a thing was missing. This puzzled Clell, but he made no mention of it to his partner, who, apparently had troubles enough.

THEY ate supper, tied Seelum to the wagon, right at the cabin door, where they could watch him, then sat smoking in silence. Finally, Marshall broke out railing at himself for getting them into a mess.

"Oh, cut that out!" growled Clell. "I'm the one that caused it all, by making an enemy of Buck Spradley, but I never did know how he came to hate me so. Don't blame yourself. You're hurt worse than I am. You've lost a horse and got a cracked head. I've only lost a couple of hundred dollars—and that ain't lost yet, I don't think."

The last words Clell spoke, as they went to bed, were: "I'm going to sleep with one eye open, and if anybody fools around this cabin before morning, I'll do my best to keep him with us."

It was past midnight, and the waning moon had risen, when they both woke and sprang up to listen. The pounding hoofs of a running horse came thundering up the valley. They drew their guns and stood tensely waiting. Grim determination was on their faces. Neither of them had ever been in a gun-fight, but they were willing to try. The lone horse galloped into view, a length of frayed rope flying at its neck. It was Seelum's mate, come home.

"Good!" cried Clell. "Now we are whole again, except your cracked head."

"And that'll heal," said Marshall, as he secured a rope and tied up the returning horse. "I won't go to sleep at the switch again."

"Marshall," said Clell, next morning after breakfast, "there's no use trying to fool ourselves about this thing. We're up against trouble. Somebody—I don't know who it is—don't want us to have these claims. If you say the word, we'll pull up and leave."

"If I say the word! Do you want to quit?"

"Not any. I never wanted to do anything as much as I want to stick on and fight this thing out."

"Talk sense, then," said Marshall. "I wouldn't live more than fifteen minutes anywhere else, and I'd get more pleasure out of taking one shot at the gent that cracked me over the head than I could ever get in any other way. Let's take the balance of our stuff out of the wagon and go to housekeeping right."

That afternoon, Clell fished his transit out of his kit of surveyor's instruments and told Marshall he wanted to group the gorge again and take some levels.

"Go ahead," coughed Marshall. "I haven't got wind enough to go with you, but I've got good eyes and I won't be caught asleep again."

After finding Marshall bound and gagged, Clell didn't mention his discovery at the head of the gorge. He'd take some levels and make sure that he could do what looked so easy before he told his partner about it.

BACK at the Tatum cottage, Clell set up his instrument, ostensibly to do a bit of engineering for Jenny Tatum. He could have handled her problem by simply looking at the ground. An hour's work with the pick and shovel, and he had water on the little plot of ground. Incidentally, he had found out something he wanted to know about the stone that lay between the basin spring and the bluff where his silver rope hung over.

"I don't know how I can ever repay you for putting the water on the balance of my little farm," said Jenny Tatum, as he was about to take his leave.

"I'll take part of the vegetables that grow on it," grinned Clell.

"Oh, shame on me! Why didn't I think to offer you some vegetables. There are plenty here. Take what you like."

"Not this time," he said. "This old transit is load enough. There's something that I would like to have, though."

"And that is?"

"Permission to turn some of the water from the basin spring into Big Bowlegs, so I can irrigate my land."

"Turn it all in there, if you want to. It's below my farm. Can you do it?"

"I don't know how I can ever repay in a week or two, and I can tell you then."

Jenny Tatum, the prospector's daughter, watched Clell's broad shoulders until they went out of sight over the bluff. There was an odd light in her brown eyes. She was wondering if he really could turn that flood of water onto his land. Certainly he could, she told herself. A man like that could do anything. There was another thought, still back of that in her mind, as she turned to where old Ranse was mumbling over his bits of quartz at the cabin door.

Clell found Marshall undisturbed. On his former return from the Tatum cabin, his story had been held

back by the condition in which he had found his partner. Now there was another cause—just pure jealousy. He would not have admitted it—didn't even know it, in fact—but, subconsciously, he was telling himself that he had found this wonderful woman and didn't want her to meet this polished, affable John Marshall, with his music, until— That was as far as his mind went. It refused to set a date for the meeting.

Only once had he been a bit suspicious of this partner whom he had picked up in a moment at the construction camp. That was when they met Mosby and he found that the two men were acquainted.

"We've got to go down to the nearest land office in the morning," announced Clell, as they sat smoking after supper. "I want to be sure of our title to these claims."

"Think they're worth the trouble, with no water on them?" asked Marshall.

"Yes. I think we can put water on them, with a little work, but I won't do the work for someone else."

The following morning, they loaded their effects into the wagon, and left at daylight. Clell made the mental note that it looked as if they were abandoning their claims and wondered what Spradley's next move would be.

It was fifty miles to the nearest land office. Arrived there, it was discovered that the documents were all regular. The payment of nominal fees for the recording of the papers and going through certain forms perfected the title to the two claims, one in the name of Clell Berry and the other in the name of John Marshall.

"Now let Spradley crack his whip," said Clell, as they left the land office. "That land is ours, 'To have and to hold, etc.'"

"I'm afraid I've let you in for a lot of trouble," said Marshall, in a doubtful tone.

"Trouble! You've let me in for a fortune and the only life worth living."

"You are an enthusiastic farmer," smiled Marshall. He didn't know that there was more than the promise of green fields, back there on Bowlegs, to Clell Berry.

ABOUT noon, on the fourth day, their wagon, now heavily laden, and containing, among other things, some bags of alfalfa and other seeds, rattled into the Valley on Big Bowlegs. Clell had feared Spradley would burn the cabins in their absence. The valley was just as it had been when they first entered it. Even Old Gray Hoss Riley was standing in the door of the first cabin, and the old gray bag o' bones was cropping the dry bunch grass.

"Mawnin', gents," greeted Gray Hoss. "I been on a little prospectin' trip over east a ways. I draps in here last night about dark, to see how you fellows makes out in yo' new home. Don't see nobody around, so I stays all night in the cabin. Where y'all been?"

"Down to the railroad to get some bacon and flour," replied Clell.

No effort was made by either of the partners to detain Mr. Riley, and he soon left, going down Big Bowlegs, just as he had done on that first day when they had bought him out.

"Wonder what that old devil is hanging around here for," growled Clell, when Riley was out of hearing.

"Oh, he's just a shiftless old prospector," replied Marshall. "The mountains are full of them. They're no good to themselves or anyone else. The hundred and twenty-five you paid him has made him rich. He'll go

on hunting a fortune, now, until his money is gone. Then he'll freeze to death in a blizzard or starve in the desert. Most of them are half crazy."

Clell thought of Old Ranse Tatum, but didn't mention him.

"Well, Mr. Riley is one prospector that I can get along without," he said, instead. "I've got a hunch that he's acquainted with Buck Spradley. Our title to these claims is good, and I mean to stay here. If he comes snooping around here again, I'm going to find out why."

A little way above the upper cabin, which the partners had selected as their home, a natural dam lay across the creek. It looked as if, at some time, Nature had hurled down part of a mountain, and the seamed stone had landed across the gorge. Their water supply came from what was supposed to be a spring, at the upper end of the long pool formed by the dam. That is, at the upper end of what would have been a deep pool, a quarter of a mile long, had there been any water in it. The partners drove the wagon around the end of the dam and on toward the spring which Clell knew was nothing but the water from his silver rope, and which trickled down the gorge under the gravel that covered the solid stone floor.

"Must have been ten years since it rained in this country," commented Marshall, "or there'd be water in that place."

"Fissure in it," replied Clell. "That's what those ten bags of cement are for. Nature has done just about everything for us, up here. All we have to do is put on a few finishing touches, and we'll have a paradise."

On high ground, near the spring, a good part of their load was unloaded, beneath some bushes, and covered up.

"I feel better," said Clell, as the wagon rattled back down to the cabin. "I know what dynamite will do, and I don't enjoy riding on a load of it."

Back at the cabin they unloaded a plow, hoes, shovels, bags of seeds, and miscellaneous supplies.

"Now we're all set!" cried Clell, as he wiped the sweat from his face. "Can you plow, Marshall?"

"I think so. I never plowed much, but I have a general working knowledge of the business," and Marshall smiled in his whiskers.

"I don't mean to be bossy," said Clell, "but the job of stopping the fissure in the dam and turning water from that spring I found is too hard for you. If you'll keep house and plow a little on both claims, just to show our good faith as homesteaders, I'll work at the water problem."

"Fine! You're the boss, Clell. If it hadn't been for you, I'd either have starved to death or else I'd be back at the old home, broke, coughing away the little time left me, with everybody pitying me and at the same time wishing I was out of the way. I'd rather be dead. Yes, I'll plow what I can. You go right ahead and boss the job."

Two weeks passed. Clell was off by daylight, every morning, and returned at dark. Marshall saw the white, limy drill dust on Clell's overalls, and knew he was preparing to blast some stone, but he asked no questions. He, too, was busy. He had plowed a considerable patch of land on the upper claim, and enough on the lower one to show good intentions.

EVERY day, these two weeks, Clell had eaten a good dinner of fresh vegetables, wholesome bread and meat and coffee, at the Tatum

cabin, while Old Ranse's dog spurned the lunch he invariably carried. He felt ashamed of not telling Marshall what was at the head of the gorge, but he just couldn't do it. He was willing to work for his sick partner, and to divide everything else with him, but Jenny Tatum was a different matter.

Every day Jenny Tatum watched from the cabin door as Clell drove the long churn drill into the soft stone barrier that lay between him and a fortune, and he began to hope. True, she knew nothing about him, but conventions must be dispensed with on the frontier. He knew nothing about her, except that her father was a half-mad old prospector, but that made no difference to him. There was no other woman on earth like Jenny, to him, and he knew there never could be.

She had come out to where he was at work, late that afternoon, as she often did, and stood watching him draw the long drill and clean the drillings from the hole with the narrow iron spoon.

"That's the last hole," said Clell, as he looked up at her. "Pretty soon I'll shoot them, and then I'll have water on my land."

"And pretty soon after that you'll be busy on your farm and forget where the water comes from," she said, and there was a wistful note in her voice.

"Not in a thousand years!" and Clell's voice trembled. "I've got everything ready to turn the water into Big Bowlegs, but unless—" and he stopped.

"Unless, what?" murmured Jenny.

"Unless I can have you, I don't want any water, don't want any farm. It would mean nothing to me. I'll go back to rambling."

He looked into her eyes, and the next instant she was in his arms. The only other work Clell did that day was to take a sledge and cold chisel and break away the stone at the low rim of the basin. This let out enough water to enlarge his silver rope about a hundred times. As he went down the gorge, water was gurgling over the stones, and he knew there would be plenty in the great pool by morning, with which to mix his cement and close the fissure. Then he would be ready to turn the stream into his enchanted valley. Then would come wealth, and—Jenny.

He said nothing of all this to Marshall, but he couldn't help showing his happiness in his beaming countenance. Marshall saw it and attributed it to the buoyant health which his partner had and which he himself could never regain. Marshall had a "fiddling fit" on him that night. He rarely played, except when he was low-spirited. He hadn't plowed any that day. The fact, was, he had had a slight hemorrhage but had said nothing about it.

On into the night the violin poured out its melody, but it was mostly sad, classical compositions. Clell sat in the cabin door, listened and wondered. The sad music had driven the gay mood from his heart. He thought of Buck Spradley, of Old Gray Hoss Riley, of Mosby and his apparent intimacy with Marshall. Someone wanted him out of the valley. Who could it be, except Spradley? Why had he kept quiet the last two weeks? He wasn't the kind to give up without a fight. Ugly thoughts marched through Clell's mind, like platoons of enemy soldiers. When at last they went to bed, sleep didn't come quickly as usual, and he was restless when he did finally sleep.

Clell woke with a start and sat up on his pallet. The moon was shining

brightly and Marshall's pallet was vacant. Clell called to him, and he answered from just outside the door. A moment later, he came in.

"I've got a blue spell tonight, Clell," he said. "Been sitting out there on the old wagon tongue, looking at the moon, as I have so often done since I've been in this country. It looks as if one could almost reach the moon and stars. Do you believe in premonitions?"

"No," laughed Clell. "Guess my liver's too active for that," and he stretched out on his pallet.

The two horses had been driven up the gorge, above the spring, and left to graze on the greener grass and weeds they found there. There was a dead stillness over the place, and Clell fell asleep again. It seemed to him that he had slept but a moment when Marshall shook him by the arm.

"Wake up, Clell," he whispered. "Listen!"

IN THE great stillness, they could hear the hoofs of several horses coming up the valley.

"They're coming to drive us out this time," said Marshall, calmly.

"And we won't drive worth a damn!" snapped Clell, as he drew on his trousers and boots, buckled on his pistol, and sprang for his rifle that stood in the corner. "Will you stay with me, if it comes to a fight, Marshall?"

"I'll stay as long as I last, Clell, but I'm afraid I won't be much help. I never was in a gun-fight, and—"

"Hello, in there!" called a voice from the outside.

"Hello, yourself," returned Clell. "What do you want?"

"Come out here."

"Can't right now. I'm busy. State your business; I can hear you."

"All right. We come to notify you nesters to get out of this valley. This is a cow country, and we don't aim to have any farmers in it."

"Oh, you won't have any farms?" Clell answered. "Well, now you listen to me. There's one little farm on Bowlegs that's going to stay right here. We have a title to the land, from the Government, and if you don't get away from here and stay away, somebody'll get hurt."

The reply was a volley of shots. Peering out through a crack, Clell had seen six mounted men. One of them was Old Gray Hoss Riley. The others were strangers. Buck Spradley wasn't with them. As the bullets spattered the cabin wall, one or two coming through cracks, Clell's rifle spat a streak of flame, and Riley slid from his old gray bag o' bones.

"Get down and rush 'em, fellers!" called the man who had been the spokesman and seemed to be the leader. "They're just a coupla damned tenderfoots."

At the word, Clell and Marshall both began working their guns. Clell was mad, now, and beside himself with rage.

"Come on in, damn you!" he called out, in a lull of the firing, as he shoved fresh cartridges through the loading-gate of his Winchester. "My feet may be tender, but my hands are hard from honest work. I can't shoot much, but I can hit like hell!"

The gang dismounted and bunched for a rush. Two streams of fire from the cabin wall poured into them. Two more of the six went down. The other three fled toward their horses.

Through his lookout, Clell saw four more men gallop up to the fray.

"Reinforcements! Now we will have it!" he growled.

Marshall, leaning against the wall, coughed slightly but said nothing. He had said he would stay as long as he

lasted, and he was staying. Clell had no time to look at his partner. A funny thing was happening out there in the moonlight. The four newcomers had covered the three survivors of the battle, and coolly handcuffed them.

"Hello, within there!" called one.

"All right," replied Clell. "What's on your mind? Want a little of the same?"

"Not any, thank you!" laughed the man. "We're state Rangers and tried to catch this gang before they got here. Let's suspend hostilities, and see what you have done to them."

At that instant, Clell heard a choking noise from Marshall's corner of the cabin, and turned just in time to see his partner turn loose the wall to which he had been holding and slump to the floor.

Clell lit the old battered lantern, and the captain of the Ranger squad came in.

"One dead, and two hurt bad enough to hold 'em for a while, on the outside. What's the casualty list in here?"

"My partner's hit," faltered Clell, looking up from where he knelt by the side of Marshall, who was covered with blood.

The ranger went over the still form that lay on the floor.

"Yes, your partner's hit pretty hard." A moment later he said: "He's dead. I guess that bullet caused his death, but the blood didn't come from his wound." Then, lowering his voice, "He was a lunger, wasn't he?"

Clell nodded.

"I thought so," continued the ranger. "It's murder, just the same, and will be the finish of this gang. We've been trying to catch them with the goods for a year. It is a regular organized business. They have filed on claims like this all along the foothills. A tenderfoot comes along; some member steers him to one of the claims, telling him it can be bought for a song. He buys it, and then the gang runs him off."

By this time, they had walked to the door. In spite of the battle and of Marshall's death, Clell was thinking of another matter.

"What about that claim on Little Bowlegs?" he asked.

"That," replied the Ranger captain, "was another one they used. The land is worthless, but there's plenty of water, and the green settler grabbed it. Fellow by the name of Mosby worked it. They hadn't bumped a sucker for months, and we thought they'd quit. Then a few days ago a man named Spradley came to us with a tale about trading for Mosby's claim and afterward being run ragged until he left it. Then we heard somebody was plowing the claims on Big Bowlegs, and hurried up here."

Clell said nothing. He was pretty sure Spradley knew all about the claim on Little Bowlegs, and had intended to bump him with it, but had been caught in his own net.

Came morning, and the Rangers helped Clell bury his late partner on a bit of rising ground at the edge of the valley.

"Now, Mr. Berry," said the Ranger captain, "we'll pay you to take your wagon and haul this quiet gent, who was wanted dead or alive, Gray Hoss and the other cripple, and the three sound ones, down to headquarters."

"You can take the team and bring it back," said Clell. "I don't want to leave here just now."

"Don't blame you much. We'll send the team back, and also a split out of the reward money."

"Just send the team. Don't think I could use any money I got that way," said Clell.

IT WAS midafternoon. John Marshall's old brown violin lay silent in its case. Clell had looked through the dead man's meager effects. There was nothing but some odds and ends of clothing and a book or two. Nothing to identify him. No former address. From a little bunch of keys found in Marshall's pocket, he fitted one to a leather-bound, trunk-shaped valise and opened it. Here, Clell expected to find papers that would tell whom to notify of his partner's death. What he did find was a single sheet of paper. The last will and testament of John Marshall, dated the day before and written in ink, in a clear hand and scholarly language. It left his wagon and team, his interest in the claims, and all his earthly effects to McClellan Berry.

Clell folded it reverently and placed it in his pocketbook for safe keeping. Whoever and whatever Marshall may have been, there was no evidence now. A little heap of paper ashes in the fireplace, evidently made the day before, and unnoticed by Clell until now, bore mute testimony of the man's thoroughness. Clell was thinking sadly, that they had buried him almost before he was cold, when a shadow fell in the cabin door. He started violently, and turned to see the tear-stained face of Jenny Tatum!

"Wha-what's the matter?" stammered Clell.

"Fa-father's d-dead!" Jenny sobbed, as she sank to a proffered camp stool.

Then she sobbed out her story. Old Ranse had spells in which he fell and became unconscious. A doctor had told her once it was caused by clots on the brain and that some time it would kill him. That morning he had fallen, and in spite of all her efforts the old prospector's spirit had gone to investigate the "little pocket" in another field.

When she had rested a while, Clell took up his pick and shovel and silently led the way up the gorge. There was nothing to say. At least, his tongue was not schooled to say the things that might be said, so he used the true language of sympathy —silence.

In a little cove, above the garden, under a juniper tree, Clell made a grave. Then he took up, tenderly, the emaciated body of the broken old prospector, and laid it to its last long sleep. When the last shovelful of earth had been replaced, they returned to the cabin, and sat in the doorway as the sun sank in the west.

Jenny told him she had no one to go to, no relatives, no friends. Her mother, who had died when she was twelve, had taught her many things; among others, to be a true woman. After her mother's death, she had gone from place to place with her father. The last four years, they had lived in this cabin, spending sparingly of the proceeds of the "little pocket," of which Ranse was always talking. It was about gone now. Their last trip to the little mining town, thirty miles over the range, had almost cleaned it up.

"I don't want you to go to anybody else, Jenny," faltered Clell, "but—"

"I know, Clell. You're thinking about a preacher, and everything regular, like that. I been thinking about that, too. We can make a trip down to the settlement and get married regular, so people won't talk."

"Another thing, Jenny. When I drilled the holes for those blasts, I didn't think about anything but getting water into Big Bowlegs. If I ever fire them, there won't be a splinter left of your cabin—"

"That's all right, Clell. I won't need it any more. I'm going with you. Wait until I put a few things in a bag. We'll get the rest before you fire the blasts."

Together they went back down the gorge in the purple dusk.

THE team came back and a week later the fissure in the dam was closed. A mighty thunder of blasts shook the mountains, and the waters of Bowlegs Creek changed their course. Little Bowlegs was a dry gorge after that, and Mosby's worthless claim became a barren spot of mountain.

Old records of Yavapai County, running back to early territorial days, carry the information that McClellan Berry and Jenny Tatum were duly married on a certain date, approximately that of the great blast. Down where Bowlegs once sank into the sand, there is now a great reservoir, and many hundreds of acres of fruit and alfalfa, but Clell's old claim on Big Bowlegs was the pioneer, and still yields its crop of green gold.

ACTION AROUND THE WORLD! ORIENT - WEST - SEA - CENTRAL AMERICA JUNGLE NORTH-WEST ALL STORIES COMPLETE

ROMANCE and ADVENTURE

IN THE JAN. ISSUE OF

ADVENTURE NOVELS and Short Stories

FEATURING

3 COMPLETE NOVELS

"WHEN THE DEATH BIRD SINGS" by MURRAY LEINSTER

"VILLAGE OF THE DEVIL-DEVIL DRUMS" by WILL F. JENKINS

"THREE MODERN MUSKETEERS" by PETER B. KYNE

ALSO — EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

SPORTS WINNERS

FEB. ISSUE FEATURES

"DON'T BLAME THE FIGHTERS!"

The Inside Story of Madison Square Garden

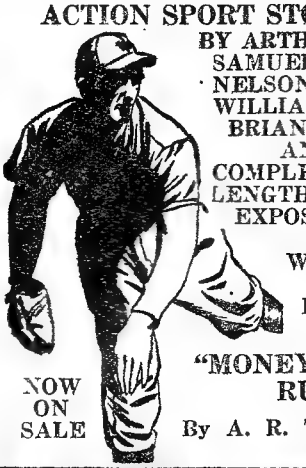
By JIMMIE JOHNSTON

— ALSO —

"THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ROSE BOWL"

The Story of Football's Annual National Championship Game—Told in Pictures.

PLUS—TEN COMPLETE ACTION SPORT STORIES



BY ARTHUR MANN
SAMUEL TAYLOR
NELSON S. BOND
WILLIAM R. COX
BRIAN LOOMIS
AND A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL EXPOSING THE INSIDE WORKINGS OF BIG TIME TRACK.

"MONEY RUNNER"

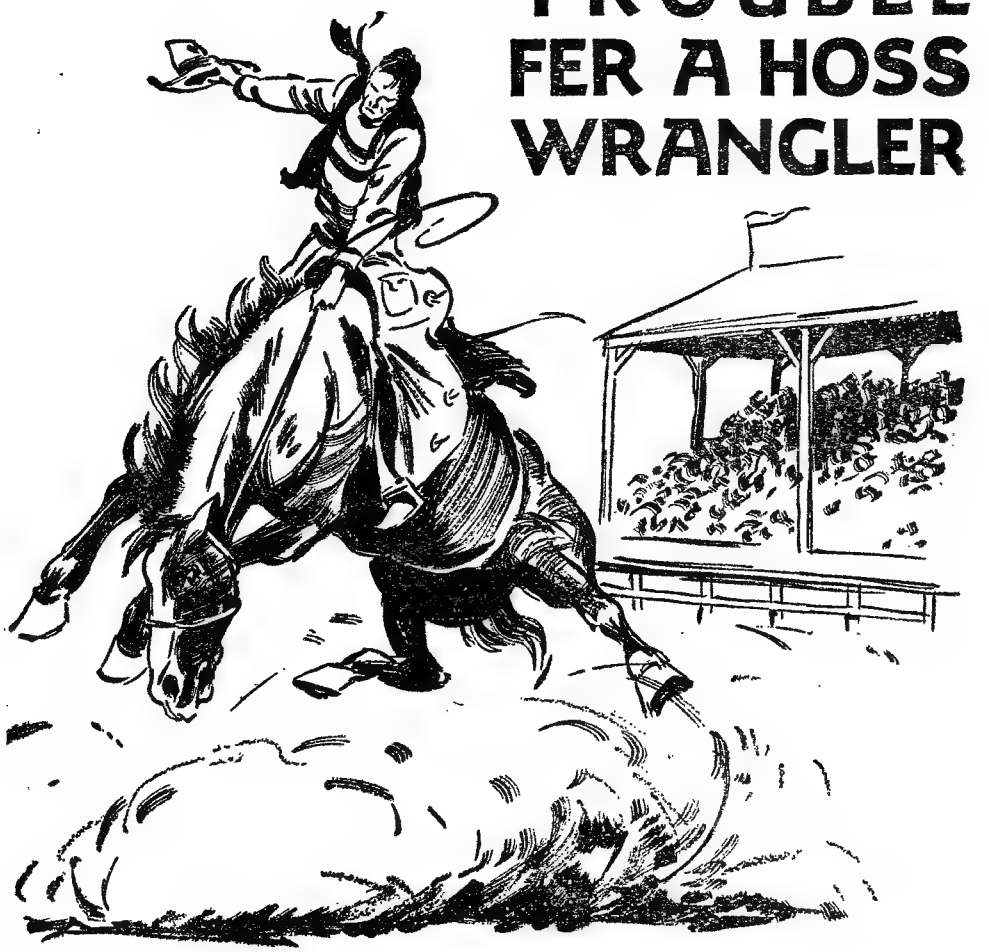
By A. R. THURMAN

NOW ON SALE

BEFORE BUYING YOUR MAGAZINE, LOOK FOR THE DOUBLE ACTION DIAMOND!

DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE

TROUBLE FER A HOSS WRANGLER



by HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

An old Texas cow horse sees his first rodeo and corkscrews the world's champion bronc twister to a fare-thee-well.

DOZING in the pole corral, Pericles switched flies and ruminated. Fat and sleek in his retirement from active service, nevertheless the old cowhorse was not happy. The great Annersley ranch, once ranged by lean, vicious longhorns, had become an Old Ladies' Home; dairy cattle. Tame cows that didn't know the difference between a reata and a clothesline!

Other innovations distressed Pericles: a malodorous gasoline engine. Electric lights. An electric churn and separator. And though hesitating to believe it, he had heard that the cows were milked by machinery. Alfalfa, Guernseys and electric

lights! Longhorns, lanterns and bunch grass had been good enough in his day.

Pericles gazed pensively at the distant southern hills. He and the boss had worked on many a roundup at the foot of those hills. Then, the boss seemed to think he couldn't get along without him. But now when Peter Annersley wanted to inspect the stock he climbed into a roaring contraption on wheels and whizzed down the Malibu road instead of stepping up on a proper cowhorse and doing the job in a dignified manner. Yonder in the lean-to hung Peter's saddle, chaps and rope—mementos of romance gone to seed.

Yes, times and the shape of men's legs had changed. Once you could see a right extensive stretch of range between almost any pair of legs that happened along. But you couldn't even see daylight between most of the legs that visited the rancho now.

Everybody seemed to have forgotten what a horse was made for. Looked as though the next generation would be born with wheels in place of legs.

Pericles heaved a sigh. He, Pericles, one time top-horse and pride of a wild unfenced domain had become a mere corral ornament, a nose-bag pensioner. Yes, the importunate buzz wagon had at last triumphed over the bronco.

PERICLES pricked an ear. A strange motor truck was rolling solemnly up the driveway. Huh! One of the Guernseys just back from a trip to one of those fashionable health resorts, eh? These feeble-minded dairy cattle were always being doctored for insomnia, high blood pressure, melancholia, or something!

And that truck! Pericles glared. Clumsy, snoring contraption. No head or tail to the thing! Just barged right into the premises like a runaway box car.

As a matter of habit, Pericles sniffed. Cow in that truck? No, that wasn't cow! His head came up with a snort. It was horse! Horses riding in automobiles! What next?

A pair of fancy boots swung out of the truck. Long legs, crimson shirt and wide Stetson followed. Pericles stared. What was this? Not a mail-order dude, and not a regular cowhand. Legs of a bronc rider, but didn't look like a cattleman. Voice, as he inquired for Peter Annersley, undoubtedly originated in Texas.

Pericles stared suspiciously at the crimson-shirted intruder. Was the flaming Texan some new kind of veterinary? Lord! The present one was bad enough.

Old "Bleak" Saunders came from the ranchhouse—shook hands with Crimson Shirt. Bleak was lean, leathery and about as talkative as a cliff. The stranger was tall, heavy-muscled and smooth of face. Strong, steady talker, too.

"Pete said to see you . . . south pasture . . . Grain 'em once a day. Yes, Rodeo in Rainbow and fifteenth. . . ."

Slowly it dawned on Pericles. The visiting broncos in the truck were not honest cowponies, but renegades and outlaws. He knew the breed! Unfit for decent society and too lazy to do a day's work, they toured the country from rodeo to rodeo, giving exhibitions of violence that would make a self-respecting cowhorse blush.

A gesture from Crimson Shirt and the truck wallowed down the lane toward the pasture gate. Scorn in his eye, the smell of strange horses in his nose, Pericles saw the unloaded broncos spread over the south pas-

ture, grazing eagerly. The empty truck returned to the water tank. Pericles curled his lip. Trucks! Couldn't even drink when they were thirsty. Had to have it poured into 'em!

Crimson Shirt and his truck driver sauntered over to the corral. Pericles flattened his ears. Crimson Shirt, looking at him, laughed.

"Looks like he might have been a horse, once."

"I'd say he was a whole lot of horse, right now."

Crimson Shirt favored his truck driver with a contemptuous smile.

"Oh, he'd do to haul eggs."

Pericles glared.

A sleek, fawn colored roadster swept sinuously up the lane, stopping just back of the truck. Pericles recognized Mary Annersley gazing round the windshield.

"Would you lamp the skirt!" said Crimson Shirt to his truck driver.

Lamp the skirt! Pericles was puzzled. Whose clothing was going to be set on fire now?

Mary leaned from her roadster. "Good morning, everybody! But why the blockade?"

Hat in hand "Curly" Smith, he of the crimson shirt, moved gracefully up to Mary's car. "My string of broncs, ma'm. We show in Rainbow the fifteenth."

"But this is only the twelfth."

Pericles saw that Mary was staring at Mr. Smith's ornate riding boots. He saw also that Mr. Smith was immediately conscious of his highly illustrated footgear.

"If you don't like them boots, ma'm, I'll throw 'em away."

"It isn't just the boots." Mary accelerated the motor. But Curly Smith merely smiled an eighteen carat smile.

Mary glanced toward Pericles, who had turned his back in disgust. "Why, what in the world is the matter with Perry? Is he sick?"

Curly Smith shrugged a contemptuous shoulder. "Reckon there's nothin' wrong with the old crowbait except he's got a little age on him."

"Is that so?" said Mary coolly. "Are those your horses in the south pasture, Mister Smith?"

"Yes ma'm. I got a contract with Pete Annersley to pasture 'em till the show. You know Pete?"

"Yes, I know Pete. He was my father, once, Mister Smith."

"Yes, ma'm. I'm Curly Smith, if you don't mind."

"Not in the least, if you don't."

Pericles chuckled to himself. So did the truck driver.

"There was a little dirt in that one," the latter mumbled. "Curly lamps the skirt and gets an eyeful of soot!"

Mary smiled at Mr. Smith. "As the rodeo won't be until the fifteenth," she said, "would you mind moving your truck out of my way?"

PERICLES noted that Curly Smith's color blended nicely with his shirt. Got a little excited, too. Jumped in the truck and started up the lane without waiting for the driver. But the driver didn't seem to mind. Just stood there and watched Mary's roadster shoot past the truck, and then grinned.

"Had it coming to him at that! The big stiff is so stuck on himself you'd think he was twins!"

Pericles gazed indifferently at a fly on his shoulder. Wasn't any zip left in the flies, nowadays. Of the great army of flies that had once bivouacked in the corral only a few weak-kneed and toothless veterans remained. Hardly had gimp enough to hang on after they landed on you.

And no wonder! Stables, barns, corrals—almost everything around the place except the boss, sprayed with creosote twice a week. That was the new veterinary. Might be a good cow doctor, but he wore horn-rimmed glasses and a white collar and smelled too antiseptic to be true.

Now old Doc Leadbetter, he was a horse doctor. Fat and human and smelled of whisky. Knew horses and respected their feelings. When you had a touch of colic he didn't scare you to death in a foreign language, but called it bellyache and gave you a medicine ball.

Pericles jumped and kicked himself in the stomach. That one was a wasp! Well, thank goodness wasps weren't all dead yet. Kept you interested in life. Speaking of wasps, hadn't Mary handed the Big Stiff a hot one! Wonder he hadn't jumped and kicked himself in the stomach.

Pericles gazed out across the noon fields. Eight head of star-trompers in the south pasture and a rodeo in Rainbow the fifteenth? Rodeo, eh? Mighty fancy name, that. Roundup used to be good enough. And a roundup meant something. Chuck wagons, cattle, dust, top-hands and top-horses and plenty of hard work. The hands didn't wear their Sunday clothes and smoke cigars, either. It was sowbelly, hot bread, beans, coffee and beef—and curl a brownie when you got the chance. But these rodeos! Had heard plenty about them even if he hadn't seen one. Professional contest stuff, like actors in a show. And everybody but the hot-dog man a world's champion. And probably not a horse there that had ever seen a real old fashioned roundup.

Stirred by a recollection of old times, Pericles circled the corral and shot a wild hoof skyward. Ouch! A bit starched where that longhorn had got him, years ago. Well, maybe there was something in what the Big Stiff said. But you didn't like to admit it, even when someone came along and told you.

Age—that was the trouble. You worked hard most of your life, and then, when you could take it easy on three legs and chuckle about your wild oats, along comes rheumatism, or your hearing isn't so good, or your eyes go bad. Felt just as young as ever until you tried to scratch your ear with your hind foot. Then you sure knew that Time had slipped up on you without blowing the whistle.

Pericles had just begun to doze when Mary came down from the house and handed him a sugar-coated doughnut.

"Poor old Perry!"

Old! There it was again. Mary meant well. But somehow the "old" grated.

Pericles accepted the doughnut as a matter of politeness. But as soon as Mary was gone he let it slide out of his mouth. Yes, Mary meant well. But what were endearments and pastry to one who had known the wild thrill of the chase, the whistle of the rope, the bite of the cinch as a thousand pounds of live beef turned over in the air and you circled and held while the boss hog-tied?

A SHAFT of moonlight struck the corral cottonwoods. Pericles could hear the dairy hands snoring over in the bunkhouse. Having had his first sleep, he sniffed at the water trough, strolled to the feed box and nosed down into the hay. Wasn't thirsty or hungry. But when you have been raised on the range you don't overlook any bets. And you don't let anything slip up on you and surprise you—even an old friend.

Pericles' ears stiffened. Someone

was stealing out of the moon shadows. Looked like Mary. Midnight—and a young lady!

But that other shadow stealing out from the sycamores? Pericles sniffed. Oh, Bleak Saunders! And what was that old Texas whickerbill doing, prowling around the ranch at this time of night?

Submerging his curiosity, Pericles turned his back. For sixteen years a slight coolness had existed between Pericles and the foreman, following Bleak's attempt to break him. All that got broken in that engagement was a leg—and it wasn't Pericles' leg.

Mary's voice reached him.

"Poor old Perry! I think it's a shame he has to stand around and do nothing all the time. Don't you, Bleak?"

"Did you get me out of bed just to tell me that, Miss Mary?"

"No, indeed! There's a lot more. I want you to enter the calf-roping contest and ride Pericles. I'd like to surprise father."

"It would surprise him, all right!"

"You know it's a shame, Bleak, that the Annersley ranch isn't represented at the rodeo. And you're a perfect figure on a horse!"

"Now ain't you crowdin' me into the fence a little, Miss Mary? Besides, Perry ain't the hoss he used to be."

Pericles turned his head and gazed sternly at Bleak. That was the way Bleak talked, nowadays, was it? Hm!

Mary's voice again. "I believe he can work just as fast as ever if he's warmed up."

Warmed up! There it was again. Nobody used to speak of warming him up. Thought he was hot enough to handle with tongs, those days.

"Let's throw a saddle on him and try him out a little, Bleak. You understand him."

"Plenty!" Bleak sighed. "Well, I'll go git my spurs and chaps."

Mary approached the corral. But Pericles stared somberly into the shadows.

The gate opened and Bleak came back, hunched under a stock saddle. As he and Mary entered the corral Pericles sniffed. Either Mary had been drinking or Bleak kept his spurs and chaps in a demijohn.

Pericles stood with forelegs braced as they bridled and saddled him. Work just as fast as ever if warmed up, eh?

"Hadn't we better lead him down the lane a piece?" suggested Mary.

"No. Just open the gate and I'll kind of ease him out."

Ease him out, eh? Leave his corral at this time of night? Pericles snorted. He went up in front, dropped and went up behind. Had a little age on him, did he? Well, just get this one! And he threw a double-jointed whing ding that sent Mary scurrying for the top rail of the corral, and made Bleak wish he was sitting there, also. Bleak hooked his spurs in the cinch. Pericles bogged his head, bunched and hit the ground like a triphammer. Bleak's teeth snapped like a bear trap. What? That old whickerbill there yet? Holding his breath, Pericles went up again, all four off the ground. At the top of the arc he turned on his specialty, the famous double corkscrew. Out of the tail of his eye he saw Bleak rise and take to flight like a gigantic bat.

Bleak sat up and fumbled with his mouth. "Git the wimmen and children out first," he mumbled. Pericles shied over into a corner.

Mary hopped down from the top rail. Pericles blinked. What on earth were they doing? Bleak was lighting matches and crawling about the corral on hands and knees and Mary was

walking along beside him. Pericles caught an occasional word: "Like your paw said—can't tell what the ole fool'll do next—have to wait till morning, I reckon."

"You won't need the teeth till breakfast time, will you?"

"Mebby I won't," said Bleak a trifle caustically. "But I kind of like to have 'em around so I won't have to be introduced next time I use 'em."

MARY'S voice seemed the least bit anxious. "But this won't keep you from helping me with Perry if we take him to the rodeo, will it? You will lend a hand, won't you?"

"Both of 'em. But no laigs."

Bleak began to unsaddle Pericles. Mary gazed at Pericles reproachfully.

"Looks as if that settled the calf roping," she sighed.

"Far's I'm concerned it settles everything. That hell-fed catamount bruk one of my laigs, sixteen years ago. This time he shakes me loose from my uppers. I don't aim to let him scatter me no more."

Pericles spent a gloomy night. Disappointed Mary, had he? But what could she expect, saddling him up for a try-out at that hour?

Waking feverish and a trifle stiff he moved out of a patch of early morning sunlight and stepped to the water trough. Gosh! What was that! Eye wide, nostrils stiff he glared down at Bleak's uppers in the bottom of the trough. Nice place for a man to leave his teeth! Pericles nosed the surface of the water. The submerged uppers danced and wiggled. He jumped back. Human teeth in his private drinking trough! What next?

About eleven o'clock that morning a strange figure breezed up in Mary's car, sitting beside Mary as if he had known her a hundred years or even longer. The strange figure was wearing a purple shirt, fawn colored pants and a pair of riding boots that would give a range cow the blind staggers. But Pericles pierced the disguise. It was the Big Stiff, alias Curly Smith. Mary waved at Pericles as they drove past the corral. The Big Stiff grinned. Pericles ignored them.

The car stopped just below the corral. Mary and her escort sat looking at the broncos in the south pasture. Jealous, disillusioned, Pericles turned his back at this incredible sight. Mary, his Mary had driven past his corral with a mere nod and wave of her hand. But she could sit gazing as though her life depended on it at those low-browed contest horses.

With a polite sequence of clucks about the weather and the crops, Pericles' old hen friend Featherbritches fussed her way into the corral to do a little gleaning amid the alien corn.

Pericles laid back his ears and ran her off the premises. Had a little age on him, did he? A hump, a jump, a snort and he launched a wild kick at the audible but distant hen.

"Plumb loco!" mumbled Bleak Saunders as he fished his uppers out of the water trough.

But neither Mary nor Curly Smith paid any attention to Pericles. He knew it because he watched them out of the corner of his eye.

The sun poured down upon the corral cottonwoods. Nels, armed with screwdriver, oil can and monkey wrench, attacked and silenced the deep well pump. Through the buzzing stillness came the sound of voices.

"Bear Cat, Whing Ding, High Chin, Undertaker—any of 'em can be rode by the right man if he has luck. But Dynamite there"—Pericles saw Curly Smith gesture toward the broncos—"he's unloaded every bronc stomper that ever tried to scratch

him. Crippled more riders than all the rest of my string put together."

"He looks gentle. I think he's the most beautiful horse I have ever seen."

Was that Mary's voice? Pericles raised his head and stared. He had to believe his eyes.

"Lead him down Main Street with a piece of string," continued Curly Smith. "But the minute you screw a saddle on him, he's poison."

"Hasn't anyone ever ridden him?"

Pericles saw Curly Smith shrug a purple shoulder. "Nobody except me. I got his number. I aim to ride anything that wears hair."

Pericles' nostrils quivered. Purple-chested Gila Monster! Ride anything that wore hair, eh? And Dynamite, there, was the most beautiful horse Mary had ever seen? Pericles stood with his head in the corner. Mary and the Big Stiff drove back up the lane, talking and laughing as they passed the corral. But Pericles paid no heed. Henceforth he would trust neither male nor female. Mary, his Mary, had gone over to the enemy.

NELS next appeared at the corral gate, pushing a little red tank on wheels. Pericles unclosed an eye. Spray day again. Nels entered the corral. The spraying machine hissed and sizzled. Pericles unclosed the other eye. What? The gate open? Really, that Norwegian fly-hound was taking too much for granted.

Pericles strolled casually through the gateway and on down to the south pasture fence. From behind him came the sound of Nels' voice. Pericles chuckled. Maybe that would teach Nels to pay a little more attention to his gates.

His head over the fence Pericles surveyed the grazing broncos. A run-down-at-the-heel, out-at-elbows lot, to be sure! Rough coated, rowel scarred, reared in iniquity and schooled in viciousness.

Grazing far out in the pasture the black stallion, Dynamite, raised his head. What was that old blaze-face stranger staring at, anyway? Ears flat and each nostril a red fury, Dynamite charged the invader. Pericles snipped the top off a milkweed and chewed placidly. That black devil was charging down like a thunderbolt. But Shucks! No dark stranger was going to run him off his ranch, especially when there was a barbed-wire fence between them.

Dynamite slid to a stop. Pericles mumbled his milkweed, but a baleful light shone in his old eyes. Dynamite was both wicked and wise. Evidently the old gentleman dieting on milkweed was a native—possibly the owner of the ranch. Judging by his eye, you couldn't run a whizzer on him.

Curious as to what it was all about, the young bronco Whing Ding strolled over toward the fence. Preening a glossy shoulder, Dynamite paid no attention to Whing Ding until he was within striking distance. Even Pericles was astonished by the snake-like swiftness of the black stallion's lunge. With a coltish squeal, Whing Ding tucked his tail and fled. Dynamite followed, nipped him on the rump, and, dodging Whing Ding's heels, snorted a challenge to the world at large.

Pericles wandered back up the lane. Had to admit that the black stallion was a handsome animal. Clever, too.

Pericles stopped, stared. The corral gate was closed.

Locked out of his own corral, was he? Whirling indignantly he came back at the gate on the run. Cleared it, too! Had a little age on him, eh?

What would his detractors have said if they could have seen that one?

PERICLES awoke with a start. The water in the drinking trough shimmered in the morning sun. He sniffed. Some peculiar quality in the air disturbed him. Something was going to happen. What was it? He shuffled uneasily.

Past breakfast time, too. Seizing a wisp of hay Pericles mumbled it. He ceased chewing and cocked an ear. A huge motor truck zoomed up the driveway, swung past the corral and stopped at the south pasture gate. Pericles let the hay slip slowly from his mouth. Curly Smith's truck had come for the broncos. The big day had arrived!

Amazed that these renegades tamely submitted to being loaded into the truck, Pericles circled the corral, head high and tail up. Trembling with excitement he stopped and watched them as the truck rolled past—Leave Me Alone, Sky Scraper, Dynamite and the rest of 'em—stolid as so many head of dairy cattle. In fact they seemed to be enjoying themselves.

So that was the way they got there, was it? Mighty easy way, riding instead of walking your legs off. Renegades and outlaws got a ride. But a proper cowhorse? No one had ever invited him to take a ride anywhere.

Pericles stood staring at the empty south pasture. Well, the broncos were gone. A shiftless lot, mixed ancestry, lived from hoof to mouth—Pericles sighed heavily—but they were going to the rodeo. And he had never even seen one.

Everybody on the ranch was getting ready to go but himself. Bleak Saunders, over in the bunkhouse window, lathering his face. Sure sign Bleak was going to step out. And the hands, scurrying like rabbits, borrowing neckties and lending shirts.

Did they expect him to stand on three and carry one all day?

In his old-time black suit, string tie, Stetson and riding boots, Peter Annersley hastened down to the corral. Quivering with anticipation Pericles thrust his nose over the top rail. High time the boss showed up!

"Well, how's the old side-winder today?"

Pericles whinnied confidentially. Understood why Peter's hand trembled and his voice sounded husky. Felt the same way himself.

"Just honin' to go, eh, old-timer?" said Peter.

Honin' to go! Just let the boss fetch out the old terrapin shell, cinch her down and step up, and wouldn't they hightail it over to the fair grounds and show those candy colored contest riders what a real cattleman and a proper cowhorse looked like.

The boss yanked out his handkerchief, grabbed his nose as though he was mad at it and blew a mighty blast. Pericles was puzzled. The boss seemed mad about something. Yes, he walked mad.

Crossing the corral, Pericles watched Peter disappear through the garage doorway.

Hurtling out of the garage like a maroon thunderbolt, the big town car careened down the driveway, mowing a wide swath through the bordering geraniums. Pericles could smell hot rubber as the car stopped in front of the house.

The family thunder wagon, and the boss driving, if you could call it that. But what about the rodeo?

Pericles' lower lip sagged and his ears drooped as he saw Mrs. Annersley glorify herself on the back seat of

the limousine; saw Peter glowering behind the steering wheel, and Bleak beside him, as solemn as an undertaker and as stiff as the undertaken.

A shower of gravel—and Pericles' last hope of attending the rodeo went glimmering down the driveway in a cloud of dust.

THE deep well pump coughed spasmodically. Flies buzzed in the noon heat. Everybody gone to the rodeo but the night watchmen and two or three of the hands. Pericles paced nervously up and down the corral like an old gentleman with his hands behind his coat-tails waiting for a delayed train.

The big, white cow ambulance stood backed up against the landing stage. A wild idea struck Pericles between the eyes. His stride became a gallop. Twice round the corral and he went over the gate and out into the middle of the yard. Cautiously he approached the big white truck. Mighty gorgeous contraption! Blue and gold letters on it like a rainbow. And under the rainbow the picture of a cow. Huh! Nobody had ever painted his picture on anything! So this is what the cows rode in on their trips about the country?

Pericles walked up onto the landing stage. Sniffed. Nothing dangerous in that cow ambulance. Now if he were to step into the thing without saying a word to anyone, he might get a lift over to the rodeo. Heard the driver of the cow-ambulance say he was going over as soon as he washed up and changed his clothes. Pericles took an experimental step. Floor sounded hollow, but seemed solid enough. Another step—and nothing serious had happened. Well, he was inside the thing. And, judging by the rodeo horses, all you had to do to ride one of these contraptions was to stand still and mind your own business.

Pericles could hear loud talking over in the bunkhouse: "Well, if you want to ride with me, get a move on! Oh, come on, have another one? No, I got enough. Well, one more—and I'm on my way. Show starts at one-thirty. We're late now."

DRIVER of the cow ambulance going to take a couple of the hands over to the rodeo, eh? Rodeo? Pericles glanced nervously over his shoulder. Well, that's where he wanted to go.

Five minutes, and the ordeal of waiting for he knew not what, got on Pericles' nerves. The ambulance was uncommonly like a stall, and he had never liked stalls.

"What's the big idea?" The truck driver's voice!

Pericles whirled, bumping his head against the roof of the ambulance. Yes, there he was—blocking the way with outstretched arms.

"Stand still, you old fool!"

The driver seemed almost as surprised as Pericles; but he unhooked a rope from the rear of the truck. Pericles froze in his tracks. No use trying to go against a rope. Learned that, years ago.

Grumbling because of this further delay, the driver led Pericles down the landing stage and tied him to a corral post. Pericles' heart sank into his hoofs. They wouldn't even let him ride in their blamed old cow ambulance!

Muttering something about "Father's pet," the truck driver got into the ambulance and tooted the horn. Receiving no response to this summons, he called out to his two prospective passengers in the bunkhouse. But nothing came from the doorway but the sound of voices lifted in song.

With a muffled explosion at both ends of the truck, that glittering vehicle rapidly departed in a cloud of blue smoke.

Pericles shot a wild glance over his shoulder as the two figures lurched out of the bunkhouse doorway, stared for a moment at the place where the cow ambulance had stood and, releasing a wild cry of surprise, began to run toward the driveway. Half way across the yard they halted and had started back toward the bunkhouse when they observed Pericles.

Again they halted, and, standing at attention, held a kind of wobbly consultation. Finally they broke ranks and advanced on Pericles. "Horse," said the smaller of the two in a pleased tone.

They separated and, going their several ways, returned, one with a harness dangling round him like a mess of sea-weed; the other dragging an ancient top-buggy. A grave suspicion chilled Pericles. But, no! Even in their condition they'd hardly dare harness him, let alone hitch him to that ramshackle old hack. He felt that his gaze alone should have warned them. Yet in spite of their occasional wild digressions, Pericles saw that he was the goal toward which their legs were bent.

"Ho!" said he with the harness.

Pericles quivered. Harness him? Could he be dreaming. No. The one who had introduced himself as "Ho" didn't smell like a dream. Pericles trembled as a tangle of harness fell across his back. But Ho didn't seem to notice; kept right on unbuckling and buckling straps and breathing to himself in a loud undertone.

"Whup!" said he of the buggy. With Ho's assistance he managed to draw the shafts up on either side of Pericles without impaling him.

PERICLES would have demolished Ho, Whup, and the buggy impartially, but he feared the inch rope round his neck. Just let them loose that rope, and—Pericles trembled. Ho was untying the neck rope. Pericles' hams flattened and his eyes bulged. Having exhausted his ingenuity in untying the rope, Ho left it hanging across Pericles' neck, got into the buggy, and slapped him on the rump with the reins.

Pericles lashed out behind. He heard a crash. He lunged. Something gave way. Another lunge and he was half way across the yard. A faint "Ho!" came to him as he rounded the corner of the stable. Hitch him to anything on wheels, would they? Wheels? From the tail of his eye he saw a wheel spinning merrily along just behind him on the left. A wild glance backward to the right—and there was another wheel, traveling at the same gait. He lashed out as he ran. Follow him, would they? Pericles turned on a little more speed. So did the wheels. Something spooky about that! What did the blamed things want, anyway?

Maybe he could shake them when he made the turn into the highway.

But although one of them shed a tire, and a loose spoke flew out of the other, they came along right behind him. Never saw such an inseparable pair of wheels in his whole life!

Above the whirr and clatter of his wild flight down the highway came the sound of a motor car from behind. What? Somebody else trying to catch him? What Pericles thought had been his best, became a mere pasture promenade as he fled from the onrushing motor.

The fenced road gave way to the open acres surrounding the fair grounds. Pericles ignored the onrush-

ing curve and struck straight out across the open. Sand, hummocks of dead grass, arroyos, greasewood—his kind of country. The bouncing wheels struck a rock. A sharp tug, a rending of wood and leather, and he was free!

Winded, also.

Pericles came to a trembling stop. Whew! What an experience!

Directly ahead of him was a high board fence. He surveyed it with suspicion. Understood wire fence, but this thing looked like some kind of a trap. Yes! And that figure, over there? He turned and faced the oncoming figure.

"Perry!" Mary's voice. But who would have expected to find her, out there on foot and alone?

With sharpened ears Pericles watched until he was sure it was Mary. Then he nickered shrilly. Even if she had gone over to the Gila Monster, it was no time to worry about that.

"I should think so!" said Mary as she walked round him. "What a mess!" She unbuckled the remnant of a broken buggy shaft and tossed it away. "Something's going to happen if I find out who hitched you up," said Mary.

Pericles nuzzled her shoulder. If something hadn't happened already, it wasn't his fault.

Leading him cross-lot to her roadster, Mary stripped off the broken harness and took a saddle and bridle out of the car. "I've got a little surprise for you," she said as she bridled and saddled him.

Well, it was a surprise that Mary should know right where he was and have a saddle and bridle handy, so she could ride him back to the ranch. Pericles sighed. Now he knew he'd never see the rodeo.

Pericles felt a bit dubious as Mary led him toward that high board fence. Someone opened the big gate in it. Pericles heard Mary's voice telling him nothing would bite him. Well, nothing would, if he saw it first! But how could you pay attention to anything that might bite, when your eye was crowded with toy balloons, flags, banners, big hats, cattle pens, horses, automobiles, and a wild confusion of motion and color? And yonder, packed together on that kind of a hillside with a roof over it, more people than you had ever seen in all your life!

PERICLES stared round with a white rimmed eye. Across the backs of the broncos near the chutes he caught a glimpse of the black stallion, Dynamite. So this was the rodeo!

Hello! There was Bleak, too; looking like Sunday, solemn as a cliff. Through the confusion of sounds and noises Pericles heard Bleak's melancholy voice; "Your maw is wonderin' where you are, Miss Mary. Your paw told your maw he would go look for you. Then your maw sends me to look for your paw. Your maw is settin' in that second box-stall, down in front, if she ain't out lookin' for me and your paw."

"Yes, Bleak. I was delayed. I was on my way back to the ranch to get Pericles. Happened to see him tearing down the old west road, so I took after him." Mary lowered her voice. Bleak nodded. "Thanks," said Mary, handing the reins to Bleak. "Watch him when the band starts to play." And Mary disappeared in the crowd.

Pericles sidled up to Bleak as they stood in the runway between the pens waiting for the grand parade—slowly forming from a conglomeration of cowboys, cowgirls, stagecoaches, trick mule and clown riders.

Who were those men over there, sitting all huddled together as if they were up to something. Dressed like policemen, too. Must be up to something. Each one of 'em had something in his hand that looked like a brass spittoon. And one of the policemen was trying to use his, but he didn't seem to know how. Kept turning it upside down and looking into it. Pericles started as a policeman jumped up and waved a stick. Suddenly the rest of the policemen raised their spittoons and made faces at each other. Brrr! Blump! Pericles almost jumped out of his shoes.

"Steady!" said Bleak. "That's nothin' but the band."

Pericles sighed. Band, eh? Well, they acted like policemen, anyway.

And the parade! Never saw a parade before. But the idea seemed to be, arch your neck, swell up and strut, just as though you were going to explode any minute, but never did. Just marched right along till you got back to the chutes. And the Big Stiff leaned sideways on his paint pony and says to a cowboy in short skirts, "I guess we hooked 'em that time!"

Pericles wondered why some of the cowboys wore short skirts. He had never seen a puncher dressed like that. He paid special attention to one of these peculiar creatures, riding a crop-eared buckskin and wrangling a wad of chewing gum. Had long hair, just like a woman. And a face like a wolf-trap if it had gold teeth. "Never seen such a bunch of hillbillies in my life!" declared this person. "Can you feature any crowd givin' her and the Big Stiff a hand, and passin' us ladies up cold?"

"I can, Adeline," said another of the leather-kilted cowbunnies, "as long as you stick with the show."

Then the announcer said there would be a relay race.

A lean, half-crazy thoroughbred lunged out onto the track with a man in overalls dangling from the bridle. Swiftly another mount followed with a similar human attachment. Relay horses, eh? Pericles stared. By the time the sixth relay mount had appeared the track in front of the grandstand looked like a cyclone in a chicken yard. And the riders! Weasel-faced little runts in silk shirts, caps that were mostly peak, and pants that looked like underwear!

Won by a rangy sorrel with front legs like stilts and hindquarters like a jack rabbit, the relay race was applauded about ten cents' worth. Pericles sighed.

"That goes double," said Bleak mournfully. And Pericles felt the awakening of a better understanding between them.

AS AN experienced rope horse, Pericles thought he might enjoy the trick roping. But the high-speed snake-charmer with the falsetto voice and the varnished hair, who threw fits all over the ground, accompanied by a rope which, when he wasn't crawling through it, crawled all over him, simply made you dizzy. And now this trick-roper was standing on his head and spinning a loop around his legs! Amusing. But what if a real, old moss-horned bosky should catch you at it?

And that trick riding? Well, the boy was clever. And as limber as a wet rawhide. The performance was trick, all right. But Pericles couldn't understand why they called it riding. The boy seemed to be trying to keep out of the saddle instead of in it.

Pericles glanced at Bleak. Imagine Bleak at a roundup, standing on his head in the saddle and tearing past a bunch of pop-eyed longhorns! Might amuse the cattle, but chances were it

would take the outfit the rest of its life to gather 'em again.

And now folks were on their feet, all looking toward the chutes. Awful rumpus going on there as three or four big hats screwed a saddle on Whing Ding, to be ridden by "Pinhead" Harper—so the announcer said. Pericles could feel his own back begin to kink.

He watched Whing Ding hump out of the chutes. Apparently quite willing to live a single life, Whing Ding pitched straight, hard and fast. Pericles held his breath. A little more curve to that one, now! Simply couldn't unload a rider pitching straight, like that. But shucks! Whing Ding was just a good, honest day laborer. Pinhead Harper stumped over to the chutes trying not to appear self-conscious. Pericles mouthed his bit.

Leave Me Alone, a big, heavy roan, came out of the chutes like a wildcat on fire. Leave Me Alone hit the ground twice, threw her into reverse —and the boy, oh, where was he?

A LITTLE better, reflected Pericles. But nothing to limp about. And why didn't the crowd applaud the horse a little? Horse did a clean, workmanlike job. But the crowd was hooting the unfortunate rider. Curious how folks who had never sat on anything wilder than a red rocking-chair could tell other folks how to ride a bronc.

Pericles curled a scornful lower lip.

"Same here," said Bleak. Old Bleak was getting real human.

Undertaker. Hah! Sounded promising. But the bronc with the long shovel-face wasn't making any fuss as the big hats screwed the hull down. That's one of the kind, mused Pericles, that gets you when you ain't looking.

Undertaker left the chutes, head down and pitching in a three-cornered style that amused the crowd. But it didn't deceive Pericles or Bleak. "Spades is trumps," murmured Bleak. "Makes a business of laying 'em away. And there he goes!"

His right leg extended as far north as possible, Undertaker went into the air, bunched the rest of his legs under him like a cat with the stomach-ache, and suddenly shifted his equilibrium. Landing on that same right foot, he sent his rider on a journey that ended in the middle of the bandstand.

After the band had been reassembled, the glossy little black stallion, Dynamite, with Curly Smith in the saddle, hurtled out of the chutes like a tornado. Pericles held enough breath for both himself and Bleak. Never had he seen a creature so quick, so viciously graceful! Lunge, sunfish, corkscrew, yet Crimson Shirt stayed. Applause for the rider was drowned in shouts of "Dynamite! Dynamite!" Pericles trembled from hocks to muzzle. That bronc could pitch! Dynamite went up like a thunderhead and came down like a cloudburst. But Curly Smith was there, not so red of face, now, and his mouth a straight line, but he was there, just the same. Dynamite did a spin so fast that Pericles grew dizzy watching; and still the Crimson Shirt flaunted aloft. Dynamite reared until the grandstand gasped. An inch, a hair more and he would be over backward and Curly Smith under him. But, somehow the little black stallion never quite went the limit.

A whistle blew. Curly Smith's herders lifted him out of the saddle. Pericles saw him drop to his feet, bow and disappear. That was what you might call a high-class performance.

Pericles was a bit startled to see Mary and Curly Smith coming along the paddock rail. Mary was talking earnestly. The Big Stiff had a saddle on his shoulder. "Mebby he was, in his day," Pericles heard him say. "But it takes a right smart horse to catch one of these calves."

PERICLES adjusted his ears to the immediate conversation. Mebby who was in his day? And what? Seems he had heard something quite like that recently.

Curly Smith nodded to Bleak. Pericles felt that something portentous was afoot. Mary spoke in a low tone to the foreman. "You won't mind if someone else rides Perry, will you?"

Pericles saw Bleak's eyebrows rise like a couple of uneasy caterpillars. "Keepin' off Pericles won't hurt my feelin's none. But you better kiss him good-by, right now. And I don't mean the hoss."

The next thing Pericles knew, the Big Stiff had unsaddled him, slapped his own saddle in place, and was sitting in it. Before Pericles could recover from his astonishment, the announcer stated that the World's Champion Bronc Rider, Mr. Curly Smith, would give a special exhibition of calf-roping—by request. Mr. Smith would use as his mount the last of the famous Annersley cowhorses, Pericles.

Someone far back in the grandstand rose and waved his sombrero. "Hooray for the only—hic!—real, rip snortin', honest-to-blazes cowhoss in the whole dem show. What I mean!—hic!—Pericles!"

"Hic, Pericles!" echoed a voice. The crowd took up the battle cry.

A calf bawled. Pericles pricked his ears. That meant business! Last of the famous Annersley cowhorses, eh? His reputation was at stake. Big Stiff or no Big Stiff he couldn't disgrace the old ranch.

Forgetting everything but the job in hand, Pericles took after the husky little Hereford calf that bounced out of the pen and high-tailed it down the track. "And the band playin' 'Kiss Me Again'," muttered Bleak.

The crowd held its breath, anticipating something extra snappy in the calf-roping line. Pericles saw Curly Smith's loop shoot out just as the calf bumped to a stop. The loop fell limply across the calf's back.

Pericles' eyes bulged. An easy throw, and the Big Stiff had spilled his loop!

"Baw!" said the calf. Pericles watched him as Curly Smith retrieved his rope. Mighty accommodating calf! Stood there as though waiting for the Big Stiff to build another loop and hang it around his neck like one of those floral wreaths.

"Kiss Me Again!" wailed somebody in the grandstand.

Something struck Pericles across the side of the head. He stood for an instant trying to collect his wits. The Big Stiff had slashed him over the eye with the coiled rope. A rowel seared his shoulder. The Big Stiff was taking it out on him, was he? Pericles left the ground, all four feet bunched. Somehow he got a foreleg over one of the reins. When he came down the rein snapped. Now he could really go to work!

Pericles dropped his head and went into the air. From shoulder to flank the rowels tore and stung. Twisting as he came down, Pericles landed hard. But the Big Stiff was in the saddle, jerking the remaining rein until Pericles' mouth bled. A lunge, a succession of stiff jumps that made Pericles' shoulders ache—and still the rowels ripped and seared.

Pericles' off hind leg began to bother him. Somehow he couldn't bunch himself and explode like he used to when a colt. Worst of all, his wind was getting short. Had to unload the Big Stiff mighty quick, or lose his hard earned reputation as a one-man horse. Last of the famous Annersley cowhorses spurred to a stand-still by a cheap, professional bronc-stomper!

Fighting mad, yet Pericles knew what he was doing. Nose to flank he whirled, spinning until he was dizzy. The weight on his back only grew heavier. He started pitching again. A rowel scored his neck. Never in his life had he been kicked that far forward! Breaking into a run, he went into the air and stopped dead as he hit the ground. And still that clinging weight lashed him with strands of flame, roweled him with splinters of fire.

Dully Pericles heard shouts of encouragement, hoots, jeers, hysterical laughter. He flung himself up, corkscrewing from right to left. Through the wild surge of battle pierced a voice—Peter Annersley's voice, out of some dimly recollected past. "Go it, old side-winder!"

Pericles heard Curly Smith laugh, felt the sting of the coiled rope across his eyes. Something thundered in Pericles' brain. Flashes of red streaked across his vision. Sweeping out from the frenzied audience came vibrations of hate, bloodlust and mockery.

The center of a black whirlpool of sound and fury, Pericles went blind mad.

HE FELT as though he were being hurled aloft, swept into a bottomless abyss, jolted, battered, flung from side to side by some mighty force outside himself. Deaf to everything but the maddening thunder in his ears, sightless with rage, insensible to pain, Pericles fought the Thing that was mastering him—fought with head sideways and neck curved like a snake's. He felt his rider's weight shift—an instant off balance. With a mighty leap Pericles went into the air, corkscrewed to right, to left—and the saddle was empty!

The black whirlpool dissolved. Pericles knew sunlight again, smelled the hot dust settling around him, saw a long, crimson-shirted figure sprawled on the track. The black hillside of people had become strangely silent.

Trembling with fatigue, Pericles walked over and smelled of his fallen enemy. The Big Stiff wasn't dead. Plenty stiff, all right, and not so big. But he was alive.

Pericles raised his head. What was the matter with all those people? Sounded as though they had gone loco. What was there to howl about when you merely took a sniff at your rider to see whether you had killed him or not?

The crowd rose and poured out onto the track. Pericles peered sideways with a wary eye. Perhaps they thought he had killed the Big Stiff. They were cheering.

But you never can tell what a crowd may do. Whirling, Pericles charged down the track, tearing past startled horses, staring cattle, bawling calves and exclamatory cowboys. There was nothing left now but Home! The Old Corral!

Pericles yawned and stretched. Ouch! That off hind leg was as stiff as a crutch. Hadn't had a wink of sleep all night, either. Hands coming home at all hours. Bleak and the boss hadn't set such a wonderful example —wandering in about two o'clock in

the morning and falling over the remains of that old top-buggy.

Letting his hip sag, Pericles tried to get a little morning sleep.

Sleep. And Bleak out there in the yard fairly singeing the hide off Ho and Whup for getting drunk and wrecking that old top-buggy? Pericles snorted. What? Ho and Whup trying to lay the blame on him? Just let either of those Scandinavian bottle-babies try to clean his corral again!

Sleep. No use! This time it was the driver of the cow ambulance. "Cross me heart, Bleak! I steps up to close the tailgate of me truck, and there was Pericles standing inside, just like he was trying to bum a ride to town. Sure I ties him to a post! Did you expect me to sit and hold his hand till somebody comes along and tells me the show is over?"

Bum a ride to town, eh? Huh! Mebby the cows paid their fare!

The cow ambulance had hardly turned the corner when Nels, back from delivering a load of fertilizer, informed the stable hands that that Curly Smith feller bane in bed over a dislocated shoulder and a busted collar-bone, by golly.

Pericles sighed. Another wreck laid at his door.

The veterinary didn't mend matters, either. It was all right for him to rub liniment on your hocks and grease your spurcuts. But even he couldn't leave well enough alone. "You ought to have seen the show, Jimmy. You missed something," he said to his helper.

"Why, I heard they ran about half of the program when the crowd quit and went home."

"That's right. The crowd was all fed up on Wild West after this old horse pitched Curly Smith and broke up the show."

Broke up the show? Pericles hung his head. All that was needed to complete his misery was a lecture from Mary.

Pericles dozed and dreamed.

"Perry!"

Unclosing his good eye, Pericles saw Mary standing on the corral bars. He shook himself. She was offering him a sugar-coated doughnut.

"Come here, old-timer!"

That didn't sound like a lecture. Mary put her arms round his neck. Pericles mumbled the doughnut. Her breath tickled his ear. What was she whispering? Something very confidential, it seemed. Mary laughed. "And I'm glad of it!"

Glad? Pericles felt a slow tear trickle down his nose. Confound that injured eye, anyway! Mary was glad? He could hardly believe his ear. Mary kissed him on the nose. Another tear trickled from his good eye as he watched her walk briskly toward the house.

After dinner Bleak and the boss strolled up to the corral. Bleak looked like a complete funeral. But the boss seemed to be feeling pretty well. Had an old, rusty kingbolt in his hand. Looked as though it might have fallen out of a top-buggy. Pericles experienced a sudden chill. Well, let them do their worst! Might as well get it over with.

The boss gazed at Pericles and puffed his cigar. "Looks like hell, eh?"

"Well, ain't he?" said Bleak, mournfully.

The boss puffed hard at his cigar. "He sure wiped the dust off the sky with one world's champion bronc peeler!"

Bleak nodded. "That there Curly Smith may be a right fair bronc rider. But he handles a rope like an old woman throwin' out dish water."

The boss nodded. Seemed to be thinking of something else. "I figured to ride old Perry over to the show, myself. But the missus—and that new car—you know how it is yourself, Bleak."

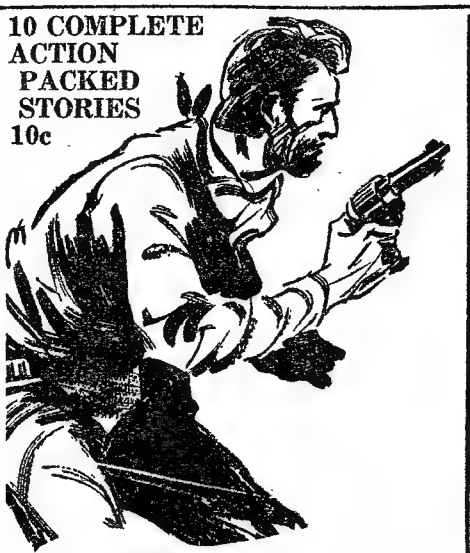
"Only from the outside of the brandin' pen, Pete."

Pete's mustache twitched. "Speakin' of pens, you can turn Perry into the south pasture and leave him there. If the dairy superintendent says anything about running his cows in that pasture, you can tell him I said it is Pericles' private stompin' ground as long as I own the ranch."

Pericles quivered as the boss reached over and patted him on the neck. "Cows!" said Peter, who had made his fortune dealing in cattle. "I wouldn't swap this old side-winder for all the dairy cattle in the state."

Pericles turned and walked away. Cigar smoke made his eyes water.

BEES droned in the flower-bordered driveway. The deep well pump chugged. His head in the shade, his hindquarters in the afternoon sun, Pericles dozed and dreamed. From the pens back of the stables a motherly cow gazed out at him.



HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS WRITES
A GUN-SWIFT NOVEL OF
THE FRONTIER
"GUN GUARD FOR THE WILD BUNCH"
ALSO SHORT STORIES AND
NOVELETS BY
HAMILTON CRAIGIE
WILLIAM F. BRAGG
JAMES L. RUBEL
HAPSBURG LIEBE
IN THE JAN. ISSUE OF
WESTERN YARNS
NOW ON SALE

Two Roaring Novels
"GUN TORN RANGE"
By HAMILTON CRAIGIE
— AND —
"WHEN RUSTLERS RIDE"
By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO
ALSO SHORT STORIES
IN THE MARCH ISSUE OF
DOUBLE-ACTION WESTERN
NOW ON SALE

DEPUTY SHERIFFIN'

by EDWIN HUNT HOOVER

Law rides in the saddle and life and death hang on the turn of a card in this gunman's stronghold.

I'VE found that there's considerable merit in havin' a person o' "Blue" Danube's caliber at my flank in a "tight." Didn't he win a foot race in San Lorenzo, one Fourth o' July, when a loss would 'a' sent

me an' my herd o' cows to the poor-house—on account o' all the bets I'd placed on him? An' didn't he locate our stolen rope horses—which we'd borrowed for carnival purposes—an' then fight his way, almost single handed, into possession of 'em? An' didn't he help me capture the three desprit jail-breakers from Golden City after they'd made prisoners of us an' were, we figured, on the point o' shootin' us? Course, as it turned out, the jailbreakers were a sheriff an' two deputies who were out huntin' for the very men we took 'em to be—which was some embarrassin'—but Blue never weakened. Before he got through with 'em, he'd made those officers ashamed for havin' treated us the way they had.

Blue come natural by his fightin' qualities, speed, brains an' last name; but his front an' nicknames were wished on him. He was born a Danielson, an' anxious parents called him "Blucher"—after some foreign party who had been a member of the family before it got to be Danielson. Wherefore he come to be knowed to some o' the boys as "Blue," an' by others as "Dan." Then a city girl, at a Ringolade dance, dubbed him "Blue Danube" after hearin' both monikers mentioned.

Blue has his faults, o' course; the principal bein' that he runs to raisin' horses—wild broomies—in the hills west o' the Rio Grande. I run my cattle in the river boskies an' tried to augur him into becomin' a cowman on account o' cows bein' less grief to handle. I had tolerable success in convincin' Blue that horses were a nuisance, but when he started talkin' about sellin' his broomtails an' stockin' his range with sheep, I felt called on to orate fast an' furious to unconvince him. We compromised by the Blue agreein' to raise some saddle stock for me an' I contracted to run a few head o' cows for him—which gives us some interests in common outside the friendship that had existed since we were hock-high to a river crane.

We also had meetin' places in common—mostly at dances in Ringolade. Blue'd ride down from the mountains an' ford the Rio Grande any day for a chance to shake a syncopated hoof; an' I was glad, equal, to ride the twelve miles north from my bosky ranch, through the sandhills, to these affairs, because it give me a chance to "rimfire" Blue for not havin' paid me a visit recent.

If I'd met Blue prompt when I arrived in Ringolade, the night when those Hawaiians played at the *baile*, Frank Knoblack, the Ringolade justice of the peace, prob'ly wouldn't 'a' found me before the dance began an', consequently, I wouldn't 'a' been deputy-sheriff-ized. But, bein' engaged in pullin' on a pair o' new moleskin pants when Frank walked into the back room o' the dance hall, where I was changin' clothes — an' cussin' Blue for not showin' up—I didn't pay much attention to p'litical honors as they were bein' conferred on me. Frank just mumbled a few words about "maintainin' law an' order," an' pinned a deputy's star on my vest, which was hangin' on the wall. Then we swapped a few amiable lies an' he left; said he was headed for Las Palomas on the evenin' train.

I'll concede now that if I'd had the brains of a billy goat, I wouldn't 'a' exposed myself to any such hatful o' trouble. But how was I to know that a deputy sheriff couldn't perform his official duties without runnin' afoul his friends' personal affairs?

Further, I don't mind goin' on rec-

ord as statin' that a deputy sheriff had ought t' be a stranger in the locality where he's operatin', because then he can conduct hisself accordin' to his personal code. For instance: If y'u're at the home of a waddie who runs his cattle on salt grass, an' the beef he feeds y'u has a strong sage-brush taste, no comments are in order if y'u happen to be a private citizen; but if y'u happen to be a officer of the law, under those circ's, a public arrest or private funeral ensues if things are done regular, accordin' to oath an' luck on the draw.

Blue claims that my trouble is that I've got a single-tracked mind—on which there's no contest whatever—though I augur him that I don't remember disturbin' any one-way traffic.

BLUE showed up late at this particular *baile*, slim as usual, sassier'n ever an' shaved till his brown hide looked like it'd been sandpapered.

He was ridin' close herd on Maizie Wogan, of Chicago, who'd been spendin' the summer at Brad Porter's cow ranch, 'way back in the hills, right close to where Blue runs his broomtails. Mrs. Porter kept tellin' Blue, every few minutes, to see that Maizie had a good time—an' he was steppin' high, wide an' handsome in his efforts to be accommodatin'. So much so that I hardly had a chance to talk to him before the "tag" dance that first taught me how official duties interfered with personal conduct.

Maizie was teachin' Blue the Fox Trot when "Highpockets" Jessup, our four-foot-ten-inch floor manager, announced this tag. Immediate, "Beef" Badger, a big, hairy, wolfish-lookin' cowpuncher who said he hailed from the Gila River, tagged Blue, thus deprivin' him o' Maizie. Blue, good-natured, returned the compliment in a minute.

They tagged back an' forth several times. Then Badger gets mad an' snarls, "Lay off me, while y'u're all in one piece." Whereat Maizie ducked under his arm an' beat it to a bench, not cravin' to referee the contest which she saw comin'.

I looked on, forgetful of official duties, hopin', like everyone else, that Blue'd see fit to put Badger in his rightful place.

He did—with a right swing that appeared t' start from the floor. It stopped on Badger's jaw, which stuck out prominent like a new saloon in a church district, an' the mountain cowboy kept on goin' till his head collided with the end wall.

Blue followed him immediate an' waited for him to get on his feet again, remarkin' casual, "I'm r'arin' to be took to pieces. The sample I give y'u is gratis. Rise up an' knock me loose from the rest."

Badger's mind, I could see from the look on his face, was set for further adventure. I also noticed that his right hand was strayin' to his hip pocket—an' that act commenced my official career. Folks packin' concealed weapons is reprehensible in the eyes of the law an' I felt the responsibilities o' office heavy, knowin' that Blue's gun was in his leggin's pocket over at Jim Frazier's corral.

By the time I got to Badger he had his hand on the gun butt. I pried him loose as prompt as possible, pacifyin' him with statements that I was a deputy sheriff an' that he was under arrest.

When the artillery was safe in my pocket I let him up, standin' between him an' Blue, who was considerable

indignant both over my interference an' Badger's try at a gunplay.

"If they's any arrestin' done, it goes two ways. That bird committed assault on me," Badger declares.

That was a poser! Sure enough Blue had rampsed on him plenty, but I didn't feel like puttin' one o' my best pals in jail just because he'd beat the enemy to a first wallop.

Maizie, who's recovered her nerve, come elbowin' her way through the crowd an' throwed up the first line o' defense before anyone else could get a tongue untied:

"Mr. Badger committed the first assault. He slapped Mr. Danielson on the shoulder, last time he tagged us, so hard it hurt me. And after that he threatened—"

Maizie's dad is a lawyer an' I judged she knowed what she was talkin' about.

"Sure," I horned in. "I saw that, too, an' heard what Badger said. I don't reckon it's better'n a twenty-five to one shot that either of y'u could stick the other on a assault complaint—"

"I ain't complainin' any," Blues denies. "All I want is for you to let Badger do all the assaultin' his heart desires."

"Now you can that noise," says I, stern, "or I'll throw y'u both in the calaboose."

"Fine," Blue throws in with me, "if y'u put us both in one room."

"I won't," I tell him prompt. "I'll lock one of y'u in the bull pen an' the other in the jail office."

"Then all bets are off," Blue backwaters hasty. "I'll be good."

"Are y'u willin' to withdraw as a complainin' witness?" I ask Badger, feelin' that I'd got myself in a considerable mess tryin' to protect a friend, legal, while maintainin' the peace.

"I am," snarls Badger, "if I don't get pinched."

"Aw, turn 'em loose," urges Brad Porter. "Let's dance some more an' quit augurin'."

"All right," I agree. "There'll be no arrests. Not now anyhow. But you boys have got to behave y'urselves."

The music started up at a signal from Highpockets, who I cornered in a hurry.

"If you call any more tag dances this night," I lay down the law to him, "the grayback in Ringolade jail'll dine hearty on about five feet nothin' o' floor manager charged with attempted murder, malicious mischief an' assault with a deadly weapon—the deadly weapon bein' y'ur mouth."

A LADIES' choice was announced 'long about half past eleven an' I rambled into the little office which had been partitioned off at the rear of the dance hall, so's I wouldn't be embarrassed by the flock o' pretty girls which I knowed'd crave my comp'ny for that number. Still, I wasn't so far off but what I could 'a' heard my name if it'd been mentioned in a tone louder'n a low whisper. Hearin' no such soft feminine voices up to the time the music begun, I rolled a cigaret to amuse myself with.

Brad Porter nosed in while I was lightin' up. He was full o' grins an' borrowed the makin's.

"Y'u'd ought t' see the way some of 'em's paired off," he chuckles. "Maizie chose Highpockets, who's a full eight inches shorter'n her an' they look like the Queen o' Spain dancin' with someone's little boy. Bill McFall—he's a good six foot four, ain't he?—was gathered by Jim Frazier's Mollie. I reckon she's about

twelve an' small for her age. Helen (that's Mrs. Brad) spoke for Blue—she'd framed it that way with Maizie, plannin' to rawhide Blue to a fare-you-well over Maizie's new crush."

Brad had a grin or a chuckle about everythin'. When he run cows in the San Andres an' Blackleg cleaned 'em out, he said he reckoned the disaster was to teach him what a game little wife he had; an' didn't they have Buster an' Kitty to cheer 'em durin' the dark days? Then he moved into Ringolade with Helen an' the youngsters, got staked somehow in the store business an' was doin' fine till his pardner's Mexican wife fed all the profits to a flock o' canine insects with no hair an' copious appetites. Brad laughed that off, too, sayin' that cows was in the hills west o' Ringolade an' leased pretty near a whole township on nothin' but notes, nerve an' prospects. Then he talked the Ringolade bank into loanin' him the money to stock the range with Durham cattle.

There wasn't more'n a mighty few folks knowed how much Brad borrowed. If a bank examiner had found out about it, Larry Kedroe'd retired from bankin' prompt. The loan had been made only because Larry loved Brad like a favorite brother an' figured him as a hundred percent honest, besides bein' a good cowman.

I happened to know that Brad's note was long past due an' the interest hadn't even been paid. Larry was worried a whole heap an' was comin' down on Brad to shave the note by half, even if he had to sell some stock that wasn't ready for market, before it was renewed. Brad declared that meant the bank would have to go into the cattle business, since he hadn't had no calf crop to speak of the year before an' he'd lost more'n half the original herd by starvation an' rustlers.

Brad didn't tell Larry about his losses, an' Larry couldn't understand why Brad didn't make good with him. It bothered me some, too, t' understand why those Durham cows hadn't been raisin' families. The lady Herefords hadn't been complainin' about race suicide—an' with grass belly-high in most places on his range why should cows die from starvation? I judged that it was just Brad's luck, or else it was the cantankerous nature o' Durhams which causes 'em to pass out from hunger where Herefords get fat. As for rustlers—I couldn't hardly imagine cow thieves so low they'd work on Brad.

Spite o' bein' flat twice within the past three years an' on the rocks now, here was Brad chortlin' like he didn't have a trouble in the world.

"Why didn't y'u stay in sight whilst the ladies was makin' their choices?" he demands, roostin' on a cracker box that groaned under his hundred an' ninety pounds. "Y'u might 'a' been chose."

"Oh, me," I told him sarcastic. "I was afraid they'd stage a fight over who'd have the honor. I know all about ladies' choices—I ain't one of 'em. Who's Gladys dancin' this one with?"

Brad scratched one shaggy eyebrow with a little finger an' looked down his weather-painted nose. "She's got this one with 'Happy' Merchat. She looked all over for y'u before the dance started."

"You're a lovable ol' liar," I grinned at him.

"Well if that's what I get for sittin' out a dance with y'u an' showin' y'u a good time, I reckon I'll be on my merry way," he opines, pretendin' to be peevish.

It wasn't more'n a couple minutes after Brad left till the music stopped an' I hear Highpockets' voice announcin', "The remainder of the Ladies' Choice will be a tag."

I MADE a jump for the door. That little wart was just tryin' to see if I meant what I said about no more tag dances. I didn't give many orders, but while I was deputy sheriffin' in those parts no half growed descendant o' Mr. Gulliver's pigmies could tramp on my official carcass an' get away with it.

I give a quick look to see if Badger had returned—he'd left a few minutes after his run-in with Blue—an' I located him over in one corner, mopin' an' lookin' surly.

Then my eyes lit on Highpockets, who give me the glad eye.

As I started for him he screeched, "*Ladies'* Tag!"

I hesitated, judgin' this to be Highpockets' harmless way o' compromisin' when he saw that I had blood in my eye an', while I was hesitatin', Gladys come prancin' across the floor, han'some as a yearlin' filly, clappin' her hands at me an' smilin' fit to vamp a Egyptian mummy. My official grouch left like mist at sunrise. She lied glorious about havin' hunted for me before the dance started an' wanted to know why I'd hid out when so many good lookin' women craved me for a pardner.

I wasn't deceived none whatever—not even when Maizie an' Helen Porter tagged me, stirrin' up quite a bit o' competition about it. It was all Brad's doin's. He'd seen that I was low in mind over bein' left out on Ladies' Choice, so he framed it with the girls an' Highpockets to cheer me up by makin' me think I was popular with the ladies.

When Brad slips past the Gates Ajar I reckon he'll find a permanent job waitin' for him. 'Less I'm a heap mistook, St. Peter'll put him to work cheerin' up folks that find they've staggered into the wrong place. If one o' these lost souls happens to be a good friend o' Brad's, no doubt he'd offer to go to hell for him. Brad's that sort.

Durin' the intermission which occurred right after the Ladies' Choice, Highpockets circulated 'round, collectin' dollars from all the male dancers while the rest of us fortified ourselves with quantities o' chuck that had been imported from the restauraw. I throwed in with Brad's crowd an' Brad stirred up interest immediate by claimin' that the musicians was Sandwich Islanders 'stead o' Hawaiians.

"I'll prove it to y'u," declares Brad. These waffle-colored syncopators with steel guitars an' ukuleles have been masqueradin' as Hawaiians since the Santa Fe detective took 'em off the brake rods this mornin'. Highpockets, when he talked the detective out o' jailin' 'em in favor o' lettin' 'em play here at the *baile* tonight, was also deceived about 'em."

Brad led us over to one end of the hall where these lonesome jazz birds were waitin' for someone to feed 'em. They spoke only three words o' American, though they understood everythin' — specially pertainin' to food an' money—"Yes," "No," an' "I'll."

Says Brad to the musicians, when he was backed by a good audience, "Who'll have a sandwich?"

"I'll," shouts the rangy one.

"I'll," speaks up the short, skinny one.

"I'll," barks the one with the shiniest face.

"I'll," moans the fat one, rubbin' his prominent waistline, humorous.

"Yu' see," Brad chuckles, his red face fairly exudin' triumph, "they're Sandwich I'll—anders. Sandwich," he points at the one in his hands; "'I'll,'" he quotes the musicians.

The girls all laughed, specially Helen, who thought her husband was about the smartest man in the country. The men booted Brad around considerable, jeerin' an' hootin' at him. I felt someone pullin' at my coat tails an' looked over one shoulder to see Blue, who'd edged through the bunch.

He made a mysterious motion with his thumb aimed at the front door. I followed him.

"Badger's lookin' for more trouble," he whispers under cover of the general confusion an' noise, "an' I didn't want to cut up any didoes for fear o' bein' throwed in jail." Blue switched his nose east an' west, which he does 'stead o' grinnin'. "Besides, I thought y'u'd enjoy a good laugh by seein' what's goin' on. Badger won't either pay his dollar or leave the hall an' Highpockets is tryin' to put him out."

It was comical. Just inside the doorway. Highpockets, all bowed up an' sweaty, was goin' through the motions of ejectin' Badger from the room, but his hundred pounds o' indignation wasn't havin' much effect on the big boy's tonnage.

Then Highpockets rammed his shoulder into Badger's hip—that was about as high as he could reach—squallin', "Now you get out o' here."

HIGHPOCKETS was so little an' defenseless that it never occurred to me that anyone'd hurt him, so when Badger, scowlin' through a week's growth o' beard, slapped the runt a wallop that sent him reelin' against Blue, it put me on the prod immediate, an' I forgot all about bein' a deputy.

"Drag Highpockets somewhere so he won't get stepped on," I tell Blue, quick, an' made a dive at Badger.

The immediate result that I recollect most distinct is a large crescent moon that appeared sudden an' painful. I'd heard, when I was a kid, that the moon was made o' green cheese. That's all wrong. Folks hadn't ought t' teach their children that kind o' nature fakes. Cheese is tolerable soft. Nothin' so hard, before or since, ever disputed my right o' way.

I wrapped my arms an' legs around all the human anatomy I could gather an' had a sensation o' droppin' through space with frequent hesitations when my head an' body collided with rock ledges. When I struck bottom I wasn't much surprised to note that Badger had been my accompanist on the trip—which was down five steps an' onto the stone flaggin' outside—but it pained me considerable the way he was ridin' me with his spurs. Since that occasion no gent wearin' spurs has infested the same dance hall with me. I remember once when a party from Magdelina continued dancin' after I'd spoke my piece concernin' spurs—but I wasn't there at the time.

Badger grabbed my ears with apparent designs on ruinin' the new sidewalk by knockin' my head against it, but I beat him into action by plantin' a fist in his Adam's Apple with most gratifyin' effect. He gargled an' turned me loose, but before I could turn a wheel, two uninvited persons stepped onto my frame in a most workmanlike manner.

It bein' mostly dark except as a

little light filtered through the windows, I couldn't see very good, but had the advantage o' knowin' that whenever I landed, it was a hit for the home team, whereas they mistook each other for me a couple times.

I heard Badger say, "He ain't the one I wanted, but he's got my gun. Take it from him." Badger was circlin' the edges, there not bein' room for him on top o' me; but I knowed he wouldn't be idle for long, because I heard Blue's voice at almost the same instant.

"Stay with 'em, Dutch. We'll make 'em look anxious."

It sounded like angel music, soft an' soothin'—though I knowed the reason he wasn't talkin' loud was because he didn't want no one else honin' in to spoil his debate. Blue's selfish that way; he don't want t' share his enemies.

After Blue's arrival all that was required o' me as representin' law an' order was to keep out o' the way. With three enemies all crowded 'round within easy range, Blue was in his element, an' the only time he missed a swing was when one man was lyin' under the hitchrack, another kissin' the hard, cold sidewalk, an' the third, Badger, was reposin' in my lovin' embrace—havin' been knocked there solely because he was a poor judge o' distance. He'd thought he was too far away for Blue t' hit, not knowin' that Blue's arm is capable o' extension like a Spanish mule's hind legs.

Horses was snortin' an' r'arin'—several had broke loose from the hitchrack — an' folks come pourin' out o' the dance hall to investigate. From somewheres in the darkness, Highpockets rose up an' joined the crowd. Blue'd shunted him behind a tree, he told me at a more favorable opportunity, threatenin' him with sudden death if he give the alarm—or if he stepped onto the scene o' action where he'd be sure t' get underfoot.

By the time Brad Porter, who was leadin' the investigation committee, arrived, I'd recollected my official position an' had Badger covered with his own six-shooter. Blue was ridin' herd on the other two, who didn't require any attention, apparently bein' comfortable where they laid.

"Who's hurt? What's the racket about?" Brad shouts at us like we was miles away.

"Three gents arrested for disturbin' a peace officer," I inform him. "The Ringolade jail gets some customers this night."

Blue was havin' trouble keepin' his eye on both unconscious strangers while Maizie dabbed at his bloody face with her handkerchief an' tried t' put his nose on straight. So he drug the one from under the hitchrack an' rolled him alongside the other. He frisked 'em for guns, an' got two which I judge they'd been scairt t' use while business was so rushin', for fear o' shootin' each other—or else they didn't want t' attract attention.

GLADYS thought I was one o' the strangers for a second — my map had been altered some since the war began—but when she found out it was me, I was plum' helpless to protect myself against attentions similar to those Blue was receivin'. One o' my hands was engaged with Badger's collar an' the other holdin' the gun with which I was massagin' his ribs. Gladys also thought that I kep' shiftin' feet frequent because my face hurt as she worked it over with wet handkerchiefs, but that wasn't the reason. Those spur tracks

Badger had inflicted on my legs were a heap more painful than anythin' that occurred to my face, but it didn't seem the proper time t' mention it.

Badger commenced utterin' alibis why he couldn't go to jail that particular night an' inquired if someone present wouldn't go bail for him.

Brad spoke right up, "Sure, I'll go his bond, Dutch. Turn him loose. He says he's got a date in Las Palomas in the mornin'."

"I reckon he'll be keepin' a date with Judge Knoblack about that time," I interrupted. "There ain't no one in town that is qualified to accept bond. The judge went to Las Palomas, hisself, on the evenin' train an' won't be back till mornin'—which is why he appointed me a deputy; for that reason an' because Pete Serno is constabulin' at th' Mexican *baile* tonight."

I was glad of it because, bein' in the financial shape he was, it was doubtful if Brad's bond'd been acceptable—which would 'a' mortified him t' death. An' besides, why should this tough mountain cookie impose on Brad just because Brad was that big hearted he couldn't stand it to see anyone in trouble?

Brad was inclined to augur. "He's been punished plenty, Dutch. Y'u can exercise some discretion about not holdin' him."

"If discretion was all I had t' exercise I'd be in worse shape'n I am now," I told him final. "An' besides, I've exercised all I care to for this evenin'. He goes to the hoosegow, Brad, along with his friends, soon's they're ready t' travel."

Brad looked worried, at which I was considerable surprised. "Lemme talk to this bird," he asks. "I think I've knowed some o' his folks up in the Black Range."

"All right," I told him. "But hold y'ur conversation where there's clear space all 'round, because if he makes a pass at escapin', Colonel Colt starts talkin'."

Brad led Badger off to one side an' they talked in low tones. They stood in the light an' I kept the six-gun trained on Badger.

Brad turned my prisoner back to me in a minute, remarkin', "I was mistook. His kinfolk are all strangers to me. But I'd still consider it a favor if y'u'd turn him loose."

"Darn near anythin' to oblige y'u, Brad," I told him regretful, "but this Badger person is too frequent a customer an' his *compadres* need to be taught that Ringolade ain't a safe place for roughnecks."

"Why don't y'u let one of 'em go?" Brad suggests, eager, pointin' to the pair which had recovered sufficient to sit up. "Then he could keep Badger's date for him."

"If Badger'll tell me where he's got this engagement which is so important I'll telephone the folks that's expectin' him—which'd be as good as sendin' a proxy. Judge Knoblack appointed me to do some deputy sheriffin' tonight, an' I consider that the way these parties have cut up justifies me in jailin' 'em. If the judge, when he gets back in the mornin', wants to accept bond, that's all right with me an' a entirely dif-f'rent matter."

I thought that was as good a way as any to get Brad to quit pesterin' me with his desires to do someone a favor.

Maizie laid off Blue while he collared his prisoners o' war an' led 'em off up the street. Badger seemed a heap calmed down, but wouldn't let me do any telephonin' for him.

At the jail door I started huntin' for the keys an', in a moment o'

carelessness, lowered the muzzle of the gun which I'd had trained on Badger. In that instant he was at me like a tiger. The gun went yonder an' I went to earth. It'd taken Blue an' me a couple minutes t' subdue the bunch an' when we tallied out, Badger was gone! But he'd gone so recent that we could hear his spurs clinkin' 'round the corner.

I just barely took time t' dig the keys out o' my shirt pocket where I could 'a' got at 'em in the first place if I'd remembered where they were, an' unlocked the jail door. Then I grabbed up my gun—or rather Badger's—where I could see it glitterin' in the moonlight, an' was on my way immediate, yellin' back at Blue, "Lock 'em up an' ride herd on the jail till I get back."

I'D MADE up my mind that I'd get Badger if it was the only official act I ever committed. He'd trifled 'round till he'd wore my temper to a wire edge.

I figured that Badger'd head for his horse an' I was right. When I steamed up in front o' the dance hall I heard gallopin' hoofs down the road. Inside, the Hawaiians were bearin' down on one o' those sobby tunes an' everyone, far as I could see, was havin' just as good a time as if Blue an' me'd been there t' help out. They were so much engaged with the business o' dancing that no one'd heard Badger make his getaway, horseback.

I adopted one of the prisoners' horses an' hit the road less'n a quarter mile behind Badger. I could trail him by the dust. When the road split at the edge o' town, there was no dust on the right hand branch. So I knowed Badger'd taken the sand road into the bosky.

Fresh tracks showed plain but I couldn't get much speed from my pony because I wasn't wearin' spurs —which was lucky because when I got into the bosky on a solid loam road again, the trees cast a heavy shadow an' I couldn't see any more tracks. I got down to study the lay —and there was no trail! Badger'd veered off the main road an' taken to the timber.

I rode back to where fresh footprints pointed the way an' followed cautious into the wildest part o' the bosky, keepin' track o' the course by broken branches principally. I run onto his trail twice in little parks where the impressions in the salt grass made him easy t' follow. This inspired me to a pleased grin. He wouldn't 'a' been travelin' in the open that way if he hadn't thought he'd shook off pursuit.

Still I didn't take any more chances than necessary of meetin' Badger unexpected. I was r'arin' to overtake him an' save my official face—but I was also wishful o' seein' him first an' savin' my personal hide.

The trail led direct as possible for Ramon Medina's deserted homestead, which consisted of a tumbledown hactel, corral an' five acres o' cleared land. I didn't attach any importance to it except that it'd make a good waitin' place in case Badger suspected someone was followin' him. Therefore I dismounted an' bellied along the ground till I was at the edge of the clearin' an' could look over the lay without exposin' myself.

First off I noticed that the corral was full o' cattle. Nothin' like that'd ever happened even when Ramon was livin' there. His specialty was beans an' milk cows, neither or both o' which could 'a' filled one side of the pen. I might 'a' thought someone

was workin' bosky cattle an' had penned 'em for convenience, preparin' for the mornin's drive; but no such animals as these had ever populated bosky range—they were Durhams!

Bein' endowed with brains an' beauty in about similar and equal proportions, I'm tolerable apt t' play hunches 'stead o' doin' any heavy thinkin'. Here was a place, though, where I didn't even have to crowd a hunch. The whole thing was plum' apparent an' didn't require any headwork whatever.

Badger an' his gang were the ones that had been stealin' Brad's livestock an' here was the rendezvous where they rested 'em on the drive from Brad's place to wherever their destination might be. Right here, I told myself, was where I could make my tin star pay some dividends to Brad!

By exertin' my brain a trifle I figured it out that the cattle was undoubtedly supposed to be movin' by now, but the hostilities in Ringolade had interfered. If Badger'd only made one trip into town an' got away smooth there wouldn't 'a' been a hitch. His cravin' for revenge, however, had led him back into the bosky for reinforcements — which, along with him, got captured—an' had certainly gummed the works considerable. Now that he was at large, all by his lonesome, it would be interestin' to see how he'd handle the herd.

I hardly stirred a eyelash. There was no doubt but that somethin' would occur in a few minutes that'd tell me how to act. If Badger was goin' t' move those cattle by hisself he'd have to be workin' fast if he was to get 'em out o' the country by daylight.

Then it occurs to me he couldn't move 'em by hisself without spillin' half of 'em. He'd have to have at least one assistant to work on a point; two more'd be about right to handle a bunch that size.

This gives me several pauses. Maybe he hadn't taken all his gang to Ringolade. He might 'a' kept one in reserve—which meant that I'd better prepare myself to take two rustlers into camp. It gives me some comfort to know that Badger didn't have a gun unless he'd picked it up mighty sudden somewheres. I was glad, too, that I wasn't wearin' spurs. I could move quieter without 'em—also I could move faster in case my presence seemed more desirable elsewhere.

A hat appeared at one corner of the hactel. It stayed there a second. Then Badger appeared underneath it. He peered in all directions. At one time he looked so hard at the point where I was lyin' that I thought, for a flash, he'd seen me. I was tempted to throw down on him, but I knowed that he'd duck behind the corner at the first sign o' danger an' be lost to me.

Then he eased around on the north side of the hactel to make further observations an' I judged the lay was as good as it'd ever be.

"Reach high," I spoke up.

He did so while he was still in the air. I don't reckon a man was ever much more surprised. He snarled a note or two.

"Walk this way," I requested, like the El Paso floorwalkers.

I didn't rise up till he was right at me. Then, with him between me an' the hactel, I turned him 'round an' prowled him for weapons.

A six-shooter was in his hip pocket! On account o' his back bein' turned I give the gun a once over—an' recognized it!

I don't know whether I was more interested in the gat or the words which Badger growled in tones that sounded like the lobo he resembled. "Come on out. This officious friend o' yours has got us jackpotted till hell won't have it."

From inside the hactel comes a sort o' groan which continued till the gent makin' it appeared in the open.

Spite o' bein' half way prepared, it made me plum sick when I saw him.

It was Brad!

TWICE on the way to town Brad tried to talk, but I shut him up. He rode alongside me, havin' promised he wouldn't try to escape; Badger was ridin' ahead with his wrists hogtied behind him. I wasn't takin' any more chances with that mountaineer.

Havin', as Blue says, a single-track mind, I couldn't spare time for thinkin' for talk purposes. I had to figure things out as a friend o' Brad's an' then do it all over again as a deputy sheriff. As a private citizen I'd prob'ly taken Badger's gun from him in the dance hall an' then let him an' Blue fought it out. That'd 'a' been all of it 'less Badger'd come back with his gang, in which event Blue an' me'd 'a' had our battle with 'em an' that would sure 'a' finished all complications.

As a official, I'd prob'ly 'a' turned Badger loose if I'd even suspected him o' bein' a friend o' Brad's—an' overlooked the peculiarity o' such a friendship. But I didn't know they had anythin' in common an' just supposed that Brad's interest in Badger was the same sort he'd show for anyone—stranger, crook or even a enemy, if he'd had one. Brad didn't have any enemies, though if he had had one who was out o' luck, Brad would 'a' gone down the line for him.

Then there was Mrs. Brad an' the kids to be considered. I was sure Helen didn't know anythin' about Brad's crookedness but asked to make certain.

"What does Helen know about this business?"

"Nothin'," Brad declares, proud. Then he hung his head. "This'll kill her sure, Dutch. I know how y'u're fixed. I ain't blamin' y'u none whatever. Y'u got to do what's required of y'u as a deputy, but if there's any way o' fixin' it so's Helen won't get hold of all the facts—"

He brightened up a trifle. "If I'd be found dead somewhere, mysterious, wouldn't that sort o' ease things up? It's a heap easier for a woman to see her husband buried than to see him sent to prison."

He meant it, too, but saw immediate that the facts would get known when it come to satisfyin' the note at the bank.

While my mind was singlefootin' on the personal side of the deal I wondered, "Why don't I let Brad escape or somethin' like that?" Which didn't get me nowhere. If I didn't include Brad in whatever arrestin' or lawin' was done, Badger'd spill the beans all over the country anyhow. Likewise if I released Badger as protection to Brad, his pals'd squeal. If I turned 'em all loose, the bank'd lose—no tellin' how much till I found out how many cattle'd been stole—an' Larry Kedroe was as much a friend o' mine as Brad. Besides that, Brad'd still be a crook even if he was free. So would I if I didn't do my duty. So would the others—but they didn't matter. They were strangers to me an' I didn't have any compunctions about jailin' 'em.

It was a sorry lay.

THE dance was still goin' on when we got to Ringolade, as we could tell by the music an' lights; but we went up a side street an' arrived at the jail without anyone seein' us.

Blue was on guard. He said that Mrs. Brad an' Maizie had gone home with Gladys, takin' Buster an' Kitty with 'em. They'd got tired waitin' for us to get back an' come huntin' us at the jail where Blue'd told 'em where I was, an' Helen made up her mind that Brad was prob'ly with me or else proselytin' 'round with someone that needed cheerful comp'ny. She'd told Blue to tell Brad, when he showed up, that she'd be waitin' up for him.

That made it worse yet. How'd I look, ramblin' in at Old Man Belden's about crack-o'-day to rout Helen out an' tell her that I'd arrested her husband for stealin' his own cattle with designs on defraudin' the bank which had staked him in the time o' his greatest need?

Inside the jail office, which is separated from the bull pen by a two foot 'dobe wall, Blue lit the lamp an' started for the partition door thinkin' it was my plan to throw Badger in with his pals. He didn't know that Brad was a prisoner, too, an' I hadn't had the nerve to set him right.

"Wait a second," says I. "Cut those tie ropes off Badger an' let's sit down. We got a few things to talk about."

"The night's ruint," Blue mourns, freein' Badger's wrists, "so I reckon we might's well use up some more time, though I did figure on gettin' Doc Swank to straighten out my face a trifle." He grinned at Badger, who looked at him stony-eyed. "We had a big time, didn't we?"

The room, bein' bare o' all adornments except a picture o' George Washington crossin' a river filled with floatin' ice, seemed cold, but no one thought t' build a fire in the stove. I settled down on the flat top' desk an' addressed the meetin':

"There ain't no use concealin' facts from Blue. He's as good a friend o' yours, Brad, as I am. He can do some thinkin' for y'u while I'm holdin' up the deputy sheriff's end of it. Brad's under arrest," I told Blue.

Blue looked at me cold for a minute, like he thought my p'litical honors had gone to my head. Then he looked at Brad, whose expression told him more'n I could 'a' told him in a hour.

"Shoot it," says Blue, meltin' a trifle.

I told him what'd happened an' how everythin' looked—to which Brad didn't enter any denial.

"Still," Blue augurs, standin' up to look through the window bars an' make sure no one was listenin' in, "let's hear from Brad how he come to get lined up this way."

Brad didn't whine any, though his face was pinched an' his eyes was pale while he talked:

"It looked like Old Man Hard Luck was camped just ahead o' me on every trail I've traveled the last few years an' I made up my mind that I was goin' t' provide for Helen an' the kids before I went on the rocks again. Therefore, soon's I got my range stocked, I made arrangements with Badger, who I'd worked cattle with in the Black Range, to stash out seventy-five head o' Durham cows an' three good bulls in a bottleneck canyon on his range.

"I paid him good for his services an' also the two waddies that helped him on the drive, which was done under cover o' night. Didn't I, Badger?"

Badger nods his head surly.

"With that much of a stake I knowed that even if hard luck rode me to earth again, Helen an' the children wouldn't suffer as they'd done before. I'd planned t' send 'em on a trip if I saw the crash comin', so's they wouldn't know about it, an' then finance 'em with the proceeds o' the sale o' those stashed-out cattle till I could get on my feet again. Then I'd make good what I could at the bank. On the other hand if I made out all right an' Durhams was a success on my range, it wouldn't be much of a trick to throw the seventy-odd head back into the main herd again.

"They's no question but what I'd 'a' made the grade wonderful well if I could 'a' got Badger an' that pair in the bull pen to lay off me. But they had me hooked. The first time I caught 'em rustlin' my stock was about ten months ago. I see right away that I was helpless, an' they blackmailed me into lettin' 'em get away with the bunch they was drivin'. I couldn't hardly do otherwise. Then I tallied out on the q. t. an' found that more'n half o' all I had was gone. They'd been workin' on me for months.

"After that Badger an' his pals come to me with the proposition that they'd split four ways with me on what they'd stole, pointin' out that no fraud could be proved on me an' that the bank would have t' go beggin' for its money since I didn't have anythin' else, outside the cattle, that they could come down on. That's why I spread that hard luck tale about stock dyin' an' no calf crop, preparin' a alibi for the blow-up which was bound t' come.

"They was into me so deep by that time that I had to take what I could get—they plannin' to hold the stock till after the bank'd declared me insolvent before makin' a clean-up in Colorado, Arizona an' Texas.

"After that they stole me blind an' I didn't dare make a squeal, though what I was goin' t' do was this: the first sale that was made I was goin' to put some official wise to the fact that the cattle had been stole. That'd lead to a investigation which'd eventually recover all that had been rustled an' the bank'd be in the clear —"

BADGER kicked his chair halfway across the room as he rose. Brad faced him with somethin' like spirit in his eyes.

Blue an' me rushed between 'em.

"Damn crook," snarls Badger quiverin'. "How'd y'u figure on gettin' away with that an' not goin' to prison with us?"

"I 'lowed," Brad told him smilin', "that if I told enough truth t' recover the cattle I'd take a chance on bein' believed when I denied y'ur story about me bein' implicated."

We had t' gather Badger by both arms an' back him into his chair.

"Now set there," I ordered, "or we'll take y'u down an' tie y'u up. I feel like talkin'."

"Tonight," says I to Brad, "I upset y'ur applecart by my deputy sheriffin'. With the cowboys in jail when it was necessary to drive those Durhams out o' the country before daylight, you was in a terrible tight; so y'u slipped out soon's folks had sifted back into the dance hall, mounted up on one of the prisoner's horses an' beat it for the Medina place, plannin' to drift the herd across the Rio, an' head 'em for y'ur place in the hills. You knew they'd scatter an' wouldn't go home, but that some river cowman'd send word to y'u in a day or so about y'ur 'strays'. Then y'u could come an' get 'em with-

out no questions bein' asked. But if someone run across a corral full o' y'ur stock, bawlin' an' hungry, it was a cinch that some amateur detective'd get to work an', without intendin' you any harm, he'd unearth a scandal that'd give cow country the Rock of Ages."

"That's it," Brad concedes, lookin' like a whipped dog. "An' about two minutes after I got there, Badger shows up with tolerable fair notions that he was pursued. I augured him into my plan of abandonin' the drive north. Then Badger went outside the hactel to make sure no one was thereabouts, takin' my gun with him — since I wouldn't 'a' fired a shot, an' —I reckon that's about all."

"Not quite," I told him. "When did y'u find out where those cows were cached?"

"I told him while we was talkin' private, just before y'u'd taken me to jail—the first time," Badger growls into his whiskers.

"That's what I thought," I started t' talk again, but Blue snorted through his broke nose an' it sounded like a stallion's whistle. I listened while he expressed hisself.

"You think! What with? All y'ur thinkin' is along official lines that get Brad more involved all the time. My understandin' is that y'u wanted t' figure some way t' get him out o' this jackpot an' do it so's no one'll get hurt."

"It is," I flared. "I never wanted nothin' so bad in all my life. But it can't be did."

"Yes, it can," augurs Blue, gettin' all het up with his ideas. "Brad told us how it can be done when he says that the rustled stock wouldn't be sold till after his disaster with the bank. Now if those brands haven't been tampered with—"

"They ain't," Badger horns in, seein' the drift. "I was goin' to get that brand registered in three states outside o' New Mexico an' then throw the cattle on the market without touchin' a runnin' iron to 'em."

"Then," Blue demands, "what's to prevent drivin' 'em back to Brad's range—"

"S'too late," moans Brad, who'd been inspired for a minute by Blue's idea an' my desire t' do anythin' that could be done; "Larry Kedroe's comin' out to my place next Tuesday to tally out my stock. He says he'll renew half my note if the security warrants it; but if it don't he'll be forced t' seize all I've got an' handle it accordin' to the bank's best interest. If I had all my cattle on hand it'd be a cinch. The calf crop *was* good, an' there ain't been a dozen head die from all causes put together — only there's over nine hundred head up yonder in the Black Range an' less'n four hundred at my place."

"Get Larry to put off his count till the last of the week," Blue gasps when he'd part recovered from the shock. 'Most a thousand head had been stole! They were sixty miles from Ringolade. That meant at least a day an' a half horseback to get there an' three days' ordinary drivin' to get 'em to Brad's. Moreover, they'd have to be returned with positively no one seein' 'em.

"I've stalled him off now for two months. A bank examiner is comin' any time now, an' Tuesday's the day Larry's comin'. He wanted t' come tomorrow—no, today; it's Sunday now. Then he wanted to come out Monday an' I talked him out o' that."

I couldn't hardly believe it. Spite o' knowin' the wreck was that close at hand, Brad'd stood up under it cheerful at the dance an' even found time an' inclination to cheer me up by framin' that Ladies' Tag. He had

nerve an' heart similar to which I never see before.

"Now you pay attention," I snapped at Badger. "We're goin' t' make the riffle somehow. You an' y'ur pals'll have considerable liberty in assistin' Blue an' me on this work, but if y'u run out on us we'll trail y'u till this tin star o' mine an' all the horseflesh in the country wear out.

"Brad, y'u're still under arrest, but I release y'u to y'ur wife. Y'u can frame any alibi y'u desire to explain y'ur absence from the dance, an' when Larry shows up Tuesday, conduct y'urself just as if y'u had a well stocked range. If y'ur nerve held tonight I guess it'll stand a trifle more punishment. We'll make good for y'u if it's possible. If it ain't, y'u're no worse jackpotted than if we didn't try."

FIRST, we run Brad's corralful o' Durhams across the Rio, an' then, by the hardest kind o' ridin', we made it to Badger's ranch before sundown—Blue, Badger an' his two pals an' me. The five of us changed mounts an' drove the bottleneck canyon before dark, gatherin' a hundred an' fifty head which we started south with Blue an' Badger whippin' their tails. Blue was t' come back soon's the herd was strung out an' help get another bunch started, leavin' Badger alone to keep the stock movin' south—which was their natural direction. Meantime the rest of us'd have another bunch ready for the trail.

We worked all night. Blue's nose stopped up so he had to breathe through his mouth an' he got chills an' fever. My eyes swelled so near shut that I could scarcely tell a bull calf from a three-year-old heifer; an' the two waddies, which we got strung out right after Badger, wasn't in much better shape. We'd sure punished each other considerable in the fracas at the dance hall.

Time passed in a hazy sort o' nightmare. We worked automatic, restin' the stock when they got too ringy to go further without grazin'. Each man watered his bunch twice an' had cleared away from the drink before the next arrived.

Tuesday evenin' late I'd circled my herd an' overtaken Blue, who helped me throw our bunches together. We crowded 'em to the limit till we'd overtaken the man ahead of us an' then left him on guard while we caught up with the cowboy next behind Badger. Him we sent to lend a hand to his *compadre* an' throw their stock in one herd an' pick up the drags left by Blue an' me.

When we fin'ly got to Badger, he already had his drive on Blue's horse-range an' we guided him to the fence which marked Brad's southwest boundary line. We took down a couple rods o' barb' wire an' oozed the leaders through. Directly, about daylight, here come the rest. They were so starved for water that about half of 'em couldn't wait t' go through the gap.

We fixed the fence, staggerin' all over each other with weariness an' pain. Blue looked so near dead I was scared about him; Badger's face was swelled up till he looked like he was sure enough wearin' a full face; my eyes was all colors of the rainbow an' stingin' as if they were full o' grass burrs, an' one ear felt like a cauliflower. The other pair give out complete while we was trompin' out cattle tracks, an' fell from their horses. The rest of us drug 'em back into their saddles an' held 'em there till we got to Blue's shack—a mile away.

Then we fell across each other like

sticks o' cordwood, not botherin' to hunt us some beddin'.

BRAD come bustin' in about noon an' separated us into neat little piles o' one each. Then he woke Blue an' me. The others was still so dead to the world that a earthquake wouldn't 've caused 'em to bat a eye.

Tears was streamin' down Brad's face.

"Boys," he chokes, "Helen says 'God bless y'u.' I told her all about it. I say so, too. Larry started watchin' water yest'day mornin' an' counted cattle as they come to drink. At dark he'd tallied out three hundred an' forty-three head, an'. I knowed that was all he'd ever count 'less you boys got through with the others.

"Nothin' more come up to midnight, o' course, an' we went t' bed, but I couldn't sleep. Then, about crack-o'-day, I hear stock come clatterin' down the trail an' you better believe I woke Larry. After that they come so thick an' fast we couldn't hardly tally 'em out. I explained their bein' so g'anted by tellin' Larry that my stock traveled six or seven miles for the best grass an' most of 'em come in only every two or three days for water.

"The final count showed thirteen hundred an' seventy-six head, not includin' calves.

"Nothin' I can ever do for y'u," says he with eyes leakin' again, "will ever half-way repay—"

"All prisoners is hereby released," says I, groggy. "Bring us in a bucket o' water from the spring an' we'll call it square. I'm too feeble t' moan, else I'd do it myself. Then go home. I crave rest."

I reckon he did so because a full water pail was sittin' beside me when I woke up late in the night.

When I rode into Ringolade to turn back my deputy sheriff's star, Frank Knoblack wanted t' know what had become o' the prisoners I'd arrested the night of the dance. Some local tongue talent had give him full information about the fight an' my official conduct.

"Blue Danube," I explain, "was headed for the Black Range, where he figured on lookin' over some cattle, an' it happened those prisoners was the only ones in town that could guide him to where he wanted t' go. So he talked me into lettin' him have one as a guide; but the others raised such a row over my showin' favoritism that I had to chaperon the whole doggone gang on the trip so's not t' disappoint Blue. Then, they did such handy work that I decided they'd atoned for their assault an' battle—an' turned 'em all loose."

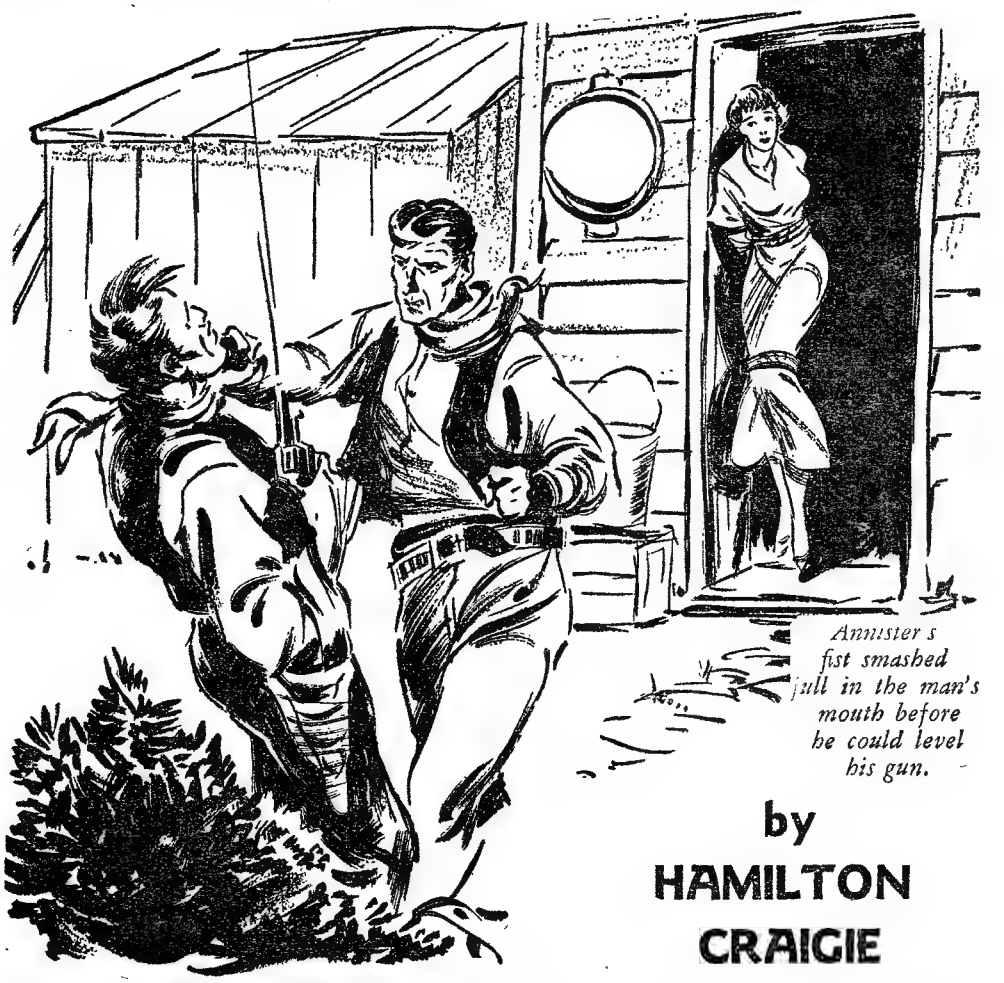
"Well," Frank opines, "y'u did great, Dutch, in cleanin' up the dance o' those rowdies, an' it was perfectly all right for y'u to release y'ur prisoners. A deputy's entitled to exercise some discretion."

"I'm glad o' that," says I, "because I certainly exercised it plenty."

"An' furthermore," Frank screws his whiskery face into a judicial expression, "I want that y'u should continue wearin' that star. With you an' Blue Danube as deputies—"

"Blue is a ring-tailed Wampus at settlin' disagreements," I break in, "an' no doubt he'd make y'u a wonderful deputy. But as for me—I got t' thinkin' while on this trip: What if some friend o' mine should get into trouble while I'm deputy sheriffin'. I wouldn't know what t' do, bein' divided between my duty to him as a friend an' to the state as a official. So I reckon I'd better retire from office before I get into any such jackpot."

A LAWMAN RIDES ALONE



Annister's fist smashed full in the man's mouth before he could level his gun.

by HAMILTON CRAIGIE

Sudden death awaited lawmen in the outlaw town of Fredonia, but Annister merely buckled on his twin sixes and invited a lone grave in boot-hill to do his duty as he saw it.

CHAPTER I

SOUTHWEST OF THE LAW

FROM the moment that he had given his ticket to the conductor Stephen Annister had been aware that there was something wrong.

The official had paid him no attention whatever until he had handed him the ticket; then, as he had punched it, Annister had thought to see in the brick-red face an expression that had become all at once queer, constrained.

Leaving his seat for a moment, on his return he had found that the passenger just ahead had swung his chair around, half-facing Annister where he sat.

Beyond noting that this man was short and square, with a smooth-

shaven face that was of the color and texture of old ivory, Annister, buried in his newspaper, paid him no heed. Presently, however, he became aware that the blocky man was staring at him; Annister had felt his eyes upon him even through that newspaper; he lowered it now, his gaze, sleepy-lidded, upon the big man.

"Umm—you going to Fredonia—ha?" offered the latter without preamble, his eyes upon Annister's in a hard, appraising stare, his mouth like a steel-trap beneath his close-cropped mustache.

"As it happens—yes," he said slowly. The man must have seen his ticket; that was it, of course. "Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't?"

Annister disliked the man on sight. Now he stiffened up abruptly in his seat as pat upon the question there came the savage answer:

"I know a dozen reasons, young fellow! But if you'll take a friend's advice you'll stay on board!" His grim smile was not mirrored in his eyes. "Because it's a sure unhealthy place for strangers. Now you smoke that with your cigarette!"

The man had turned abruptly without further speech. At first Annister had had an idea that the man was drunk and obviously trying to pick a quarrel; such things were not unusual. But the queerness of it, coupled with that frowning stare of the conductor's, had given him food for thought.

He had never seen the man before; of that much he was certain. He smiled grimly now as, out of the tail of his eye he saw the conductor at the car's end in low-voiced talk with a tall man with a scar. He had caught them looking his way; plainly he had become all at once an object of interest—of suspicion—and of something more. Well, it was all in the day's work.

For that, whatever their interest might be, they had penetrated his identity Black Steve Annister did not believe; he had been very careful about that. He had shaved off his mustache; he was certain that he was unknown, the sole distinguishing mark of his calling the small gold button reversed on the inside of his vest. And nobody had paid him any attention until the surrender of his ticket.

The mystery, if it was a mystery—the shrugs, the looks, the half-veiled and wholly mysterious behavior of the men there in the car—he had in a measure been prepared for that—but he had scarcely expected that it would come so soon.

Rising now, he sauntered forward to the vestibule to meet the conductor passing through.

"Oh, Mr. Annister, just a moment!" the official said, his voice audible above the thunder of the train.

"Well?" asked Annister, and his tone was cold and quiet. "Well?"

But the conductor's expression was the reverse of hostile; his tone, when he spoke, deprecating, apologetic:

"No offense, sir, but if you'll take an old-timer's advice, you stay aboard this train! I thought I ought to warn you, seeing as how"—he paused—"well, Fredonia's a mighty bad place for strangers, mister! All I can say is that it's a close corporation, mighty close, and down here in Arizona, southwest of the law, as you might say, almost anything's liable to happen. They don't know who you are and they don't care; they run things pretty much to suit themselves—judge, jury, officers of the peace. They don't know you, mister, but maybe they suspect. And if I happened to be you I'd stay aboard."

"Thanks," returned Annister dryly. "And I mean what I say. But—I'm getting off!"

He turned, walking to his seat, and there on the cushion, tucked into a corner, was a glint of white—a note.

Palming it with steady fingers, he glanced at it behind his newspaper. It was a square of paper, the writing on it in a feminine hand. There had been no woman in the Pullman; Annister had seen none; but now as he fingered the note he seemed to remember the passage of a tall, golden blonde; she had brushed by him as he had been talking to the conductor.

"Be warned in time. Fredonia is not safe—for you. Stay aboard."

There was no signature.

Annister grinned, a mere facial contraction of the lips.

The plot was thickening with a vengeance! But as the train slowed for the station stop at Fredonia he was not prepared for that which followed.

Shouldering his heavy grip, he was approaching the door, when of a sudden, as if uprisen from the floor, he was aware of the blocky man with whom he had spoken back there in the seat.

"You better go right back an' sit down, young fellow!" he said out of the corner of his mouth. "The air is sure unhealthy around these parts, I'm shouting! Now, you go right back an' sit down!"

Annister surveyed the man for a split-second, eye to eye. The train was slowing for the station stop. This —well, it was just a little bit too much!

The blocky man was barring his way, in his glance a truculence that spoke, after all, plainer than any words. They did not know him, and yet they would not let him pass. And to Stephen Annister opposition was like a red rag to a bull.

He turned, lowering his heavy bag; then his fist, behind it the full weight of his two hundred pounds of iron-hard muscle, curved upward in a short arc. There was a spanking thud; the blocky man, collapsing inward like an empty bag, fell face downward upon the flooring.

"The devil you say!" said Black Steve Annister, vaulting to the platform with never a backward glance.

He was practically down and out. Annister's face was wreathed in a grim smile as he surveyed the result of his handiwork.

Such was the manner of his coming.

CHAPTER II

BEHIND THE ARRAS

IT WAS coming on to evening as Annister, bag in hand, walked swiftly along the single street to the hotel.

There was a little knot of men standing on the plank sidewalk as he passed; they might have been mining men, punchers—all with high, wide Stetsons, and trousers tucked into boot-tops—save for a certain hard recklessness in their faces, the faces of men, as Annister judged, who would do their work, if they did any work, out of the sun.

But they let him pass without comment. As he went onward to the hotel he was aware of an atmosphere that was electric in the quiet street.

But once in his room and his bag unpacked, following his plan he went downward to the long bar, where openly, and without the usual precautions, drinks could be had by any one who paid the price.

There were three men at the long bar; they glanced at Annister and away as, his elbows upon the mahogany, he drank—then drank again.

As a matter of fact, however, he drank but a tenth of what he had ordered, disposing of the remainder by the simple process of spilling it partly upon the bar and partly into the cuspidor at his feet.

Annister would have made a good actor if he had not chosen a more hazardous profession. In a very little while he was to all outward seeming more than three-parts drunk, and in accordance with his role, now staggering heavily to a chair, he sat down in the shadows at a small table behind which was a partition. Annister had noticed that partition and the alcove behind it.

Now he sat down heavily, head resting on his crossed arms, the bartender exchanging a wink with the three men opposite as, in the doorway there came a tall man booted and spurred, accompanied by another and a smaller man; the two passed inward to the dining-room at the rear without speech.

But as they passed the apparently sleeping Annister the tall man froze rigid where he stood.

"Umm!" he whispered, his glance upon his companion in an abruptly questioning look. For a moment he hesitated, in the short man's face a sudden tight-lipped threat, then they had vanished in the shadows at the rear.

By now it had come on to evening. Annister, listening with all his ears, heard on a sudden the soft scrape of a chair; then a thick whisper like a wedge of sound; it sounded from the partition at his back.

"Frisco, you saw him; what's his game—ha? But he seemed dam' well drunk just now, I'll tell a man!"

Annister knew well enough that they were discussing him. But he listened now as the purring voice went on:

"Tonight, then, at Benrimo's — Shorty an' you, Cranch an' Tucson Charlie Westervelt. Idaho reports he had t' bump off the express messenger on that last stick-up this side of Mojave. Well, so-long, you guys; we're all set."

There came a scraping of chairs as the men arose; then as they passed him going out Annister could feel those eyes boring into his back.

But nothing happened.

The door slammed shut; then — and Annister must have seemed like a man fathoms deep in dreams — there came a quick hand on his shoulder and a voice:

"Hey, there—tumble up!"

Annister muttered, stirring in his seat; then he looked up, heavy-lidded, to face the bartender. The long room was empty; it was late. The bartender, a big man with, for a bartender, a singularly square jaw and an eye that was like a brad-awl, spoke suddenly behind his hand:

"Benrimo's—know where it is?"

The harsh whisper cut like a knife-blade through the silence.

Annister grinned. For a man who had consumed more than his share of hard liquor he seemed singularly bright-eyed, alert. He grinned again, favoring the knight of the apron with a prodigious wink, as for a half-minute the latter spoke rapidly and low.

"Benrimo's, Steve — that's right close to the feed-and-grain store; you can't miss it. I couldn't write, and I had no chance to wire, but you've seen and heard a little—ha? They're a bad bunch, an' they've got Fredonia in a triple cinch—judge, jury, the whole kit-and-caboodle. And it was Rooker—you saw him on the train—tall man with a scar running from eyebrow to chin—that started it. Supposed to be a lawyer, sure—but I think he's a 'con'; smooth as oil,

though; you never see his hand. An' the only way to put the darbies on 'em is to get 'em with the goods."

He paused, his quick glance searching the shadows, his hand going to his belt. Then he continued:

"I'm pretty sure they don't suspect me—yet. I gave them a straight story right out of Dannemora," he chuckled. "Now, I'll be there with bells! There's an empty loft just over the feed-store; you can get in there from the outside at the back—you'll see—but you watch your step."

He paused again as, out of the shadows at the rear there came a sudden movement like the flicker of a wind-blown leaf.

TOGETHER, Annister in the lead, guns out, they rounded the partition at a plunging rush, to find—just nothing.

The bartender, his face gray under its tan, blinked in the sudden effulgence of the light as Annister's hand, reaching, had snapped on the switch. But there was no one there.

And then abruptly Annister stiffened like a pointer at gaze.

There on the table was a note pinned down with a bowie-knife.

Annister, reading it, handed it to the bartender in silence.

"MISTER STEVE BLACK ANNISTER: You did me a favor once, so—watch your step. They're not wise yet—but they suspect. And when they know you'll never go back home—except as freight.

"A FRIEND."

Annister, his face dark under the light, stood for a moment, his brows wrinkled in a frown.

Turning to the bartender with a whispered word, at the latter's hand upon his sleeve, he waited as the words came slow in a breathing murmur:

"That's Rooker's girl, Steve! I know the hand. Well, what do you know about that!"

But once in his room Annister, opening his heavy bag, smiled grimly now, his eyes with a quick stare upon the closet and the bed.

The bag had been ransacked by a practiced hand.

Another might never even have suspected, but Annister knew, and knowing, with his hand upon the lining of his coat, he grinned without mirth, closing the bag and snapping out the light.

Then—for by this time it was black dark—he ran up the window with a careful hand, to lean outward a moment; then, coasting down the water-pipe, had gained the roadway and the quick-breathing night.

Annister had no self-delusions as to that which he was about to do. These were desperate men, southwest of the law, indeed, for such law as might be found here was their own. But so far they had flourished, a law unto themselves: plundering, hi-jacking, running the country ragged with their long-riding, hard-bitten band of outlaws who in the daytime took their ease under the protection of the "law."

It was a large order for Annister to capture them, because, with a man for leader whose cunning more than matched that of the wolf, so far there had been no slightest actual proof of their guilt.

Thinking these thoughts, he went forward now in the dense darkness that was like the bottom of a well until, in the gray loom of a building just across, he halted, feeling forward to where, against the clapboarded wall, there was a door.

But the door was locked and barred.

Above him, as he was aware from the bartender's description, there was

another door—it would be open; the bartender had seen to that. But the wall sprang sheer; there was not handhold on it for a cat.

Annister, waiting a moment, heard nothing—no sound. Then from beneath his coat he produced what might have been a jointed fishing-rod; he made a cast and a brief tug backward told him that he had struck. Then up the wire ladder that had opened out following his cast he mounted, rung by careful rung, to find himself facing that upper door.

He pushed it open slowly, carefully, moving in a darkness that was like soot, until just beneath the flooring there was a small, round hole.

From below as he stood rigid listening, holding his breath, there came a brief murmur of voices, the clink of glass, a thick oath. He bent, looking downward through the hole, to see a group of men; he counted them —six—they were seated at a round table, Rooker at the head.

Just under his hand Annister made out to feel what seemed to be a trap-door; well, he must be careful of that. But he listened, breathless now, to the slow words of the tall man with the scar:

"Well—we're all here now, Idaho; it's up to you!"

The man called Idaho, a swart, short fellow with a face scarred and scabbed with late-healed cicatrices and pocked blue with powder burns, spoke out of the corner of his mouth; his voice reached the listener above in a hoarse, snarling rumble:

"A hundred thousand, Chief — an' it's all here! We flagged the train like you said, uncoupled th' engine; th' rest was like takin' candy from a baby! But that dam' messenger—he had no sense! I bored him—an' Tucson Charlie an' me, we come a-fannin' an' a-foggin' thisaway hell-bent. Same old dead-open-an'-shut, Chief, I'll tell a man!"

Annister drew in his breath with a sudden sharp, hissing inspiration. At last! For as he listened now, it was enough, and more than enough, evidence at the last sufficient to set in motion the slow wheels of Justice in that great city three thousand miles distant, a century removed.

Then he heard a grim, grating laugh. There came a slither of wood upon wood, a wrench, a twist; his hand, palm downward upon the trap-door, of a sudden felt empty air; then, spread-eagled sidewise in a flying fall, he had crashed downward, turning in air, to land, cat-like, upon the balls of his feet.

Dazzled by the light, he could see merely an encircling ring of faces; they grinned, ferocious as wolves, as, ringing to the rafters, he heard a voice:

"Black Steve Annister—welcome to our city! Now—you infernal dick—we've got you, and we've got you good!"

IT WAS Rooker's voice.

Annister, with that ring of death about him, faces wolfish under the light, felt that it was the end. Fool that he had been, he told himself, not to have seen and known. That trap-door and the fact that he had been there above them — the thing was plain. They had played with him, hooked him, and now he would never go back.

Behind him and a little to one side there was an open door, and beyond this door, as he could see, was a pool-table, its shaded light shining on a rack of balls. That much he could see as, his wide mouth smiling in a grin of death, Idaho swung up his gun.

Annister, a scant three paces from that door, saw and weighed everything in one lightning glance of flashing appraisal. Hemmed in as he was, with that pistol leveled at his heart, awaiting merely the pressure of the killer's finger, to go for his own gun would be of no avail; he could not even go down fighting, one against the mob.

But for a split-second Idaho hesitated. In that instant the operative had acted.

Hands pressed flat upon the flooring, as a sprinter beating the gun, he hurled himself forward and away, even as the killer's gun crashed, roaring in the narrow room.

Annister's leap had taken him into and through the doorway, the killer's bullet driving into the casing with a smacking thud as, in a long dive under the pool-table, the operative, rising at the far end, came into action; in the narrow door the bandits cursing, impeded each other in their rush.

The operative's gun was gone; he had known it in the split second that he had made that leap. Now, however, as the dark face of Rooker showed for a moment in the press, the operative had taken aim and fired —a pool ball, curving in a short arc, had struck the leader fair. Full between Rooker's eyes it landed with a sound like the sound of a butcher's cleaver on the chopping-block; the lawyer staggered, collapsed backward with a grunt as the others, Idaho in the lead, burst inward.

But the door was narrow. Before he had been a detective Annister as a baseball player had been more than fair. Now as a conjurer manipulates his globes Annister hurled his heavy missiles in a steady stream; they hurtled forward with the speed of light, each to its mark.

In that narrow doorway, crowding close, they were, for the moment, powerless against this human tornado sharpshooting at a distance at which it was impossible to miss. Gunplay was useless. The door would not hold more than two of them together; now with the six struggling, cursing, their leader down, Idaho sprawled his full length, the operative, hurling the last of his ammunition in a sudden burst, had leaped through the rear door and away.

He must run for it—but whither?

Behind him, as he well knew, the bandits, desperate now, would in a moment be on his trail. And it was when, turning the angle of the wall, he was bunching his muscles for the quick desperate sally backward to the hotel that he groaned, stumbled, slumped downward to the dust.

As the last flicker of conscious thought remained it seemed to Annister that he had heard, as a sound heard in dreams, the low drone of a motor rising and dying against the night.

CHAPTER III

"ROOKER'S GIRL"

ANNISTER awoke to a cool wind blowing upon his forehead. Again he was hearing the drone of the motor, but abruptly the cool wind had changed to something else—a hand, cool and soft, that rested upon his forehead, and was withdrawn.

Opening his eyes, he was aware of the night sky and the stars; the cloud-rack had rolled off to the west; and then, as the car purred onward, he saw on a sudden a face like a white, glimmering oval, as the voice reached him as on a bridge of dreams:

"They got you—in the shoulder—

high up. An inch lower and they'd have fixed you good!"

The girl's voice came above the rattle of the engine; the operative knew it even as he knew that he was, somehow, safe, secure. For it was the golden-haired girl he had seen on the train.

"I warned you twice," she was saying. "But I must say it didn't seem to do a bit of good, Mister Black Steve Annister! If I hadn't been waiting for—for Mr. Rooker"—she hesitated, then went on—"they'd have got you plenty!"

"Waiting for Mr. Rooker!" Annister sat bolt upright in his seat, then subsided with a stifled groan. The girl's voice went on, like a cool wind:

"Easy does it, Mister Steve! If you keep quiet I know a place where you'll be all right in two or three days. We'll be there in no time."

Annister could not put the pieces together, dozing finally to wake at a low word from the girl:

"We're here, partner," she said.

In a little clearing there was a cabin, a shack, built against two conifers, that, rising, showed clear where their black boles met high up, to form a platform, and from this platform, as he could see, there ran a rope ladder winding and twisting like a snake downward to the hut.

"The lookout," explained the girl, her firm hand under her companion's elbow as, with a twisted grin, he hobbled from the car. "Rooker's not wise to this," she told him. "We're safe—but I'd give something to see his face when he finds me gone."

The cabin was well furnished, simply but with a touch of comfort, as Annister could see. Propped on a narrow bunk, he watched, in his eyes a faint glow that was like a fire lighted, as the girl, busy with the sheet-iron stove, paid him no heed.

Gazing at her, he was aware of a sudden warmth about the heart, and with it, after a moment, a swift, invading chill that was like a cold, probing hand.

Unreasonably he found himself wishing that she was not Rooker's girl, for although she had saved his life, what was she to him? Strangely, illogically, of a sudden he had an insane desire to rise, take her in his arms, hold her for just long enough to give and to receive one kiss. And as if, somehow, she felt the burden of his thought, she turned and a slow flush enveloped her from the bare hollow of her throat upward to the white forehead, with its chestnut curls.

She frowned delicately, but she did not meet his eyes. Then:

"Dinner's most ready, partner," she said, and again, at the word, Annister's pulse leaped up in answer as, propped in his bunk, she ministered to him with a sudden, impersonal detachment, her face expressionless, the smile gone from his lips as, abruptly she began to speak:

"I warned you—twice. You see, I didn't know you were—an operative. I knew—well, you see, I didn't want to see you killed, I reckon, and Rooker 'd shoot a man just for the pleasure of seeing him kick. They're a bad bunch, worse than the old Jackson's Hole gang; the whole town's in on it; and they're not merely suspicious of strangers, they don't let 'em leave! That is, if they try to stay longer than overnight."

She paused, her eyes on a sudden raised to his.

Again he was hearing her voice like bells chiming in the narrow room:

"Crime, incorporated—that is what Rooker calls it—he and Idaho and Tucson Charlie Westervelt and

Shorty, killers, all of them, but Allison Rooker's the worst of the lot!"

Raising upon one elbow, the detective's fingers, reaching, had closed upon her slim wrist in a grip of iron.

IT WAS not upon her rounded shoulder that the operative's gaze had rested, but where the flannel shirt, turning backward with the movement, had shown on a sudden the dull glint of gold, the badge of the Secret Service.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked low, and now at a something in his face the girl's eyes answered with a straight, level look.

"Because—I was coming to that," she told him. "And—and you believed that I was Rooker's girl!"

She an operative! Annister would scarcely have believed it, but then he knew well enough that the bartender, for instance, working with him would have alike deceived had he not known. And he knew, too, that it was a rigid rule of the department that the left hand, say, would know nothing of what the right hand would be doing; it was nothing uncommon for half a dozen men working on the same case to be, each of them, aware only of his particular part.

Annister had heard that, in addition to the "bartender," another operative had been sent on ahead, but he had had no instructions from his chief other than to expect the unexpected. Abruptly he spoke, and his voice vibrated with a something deep down that he could not quite control:

"Well, partner—I'm glad!" he said. "Of course, I didn't know who you were, and I apologize here and now for associating you with this fellow Rooker, even in thought! But—I've evidence enough, and pretty soon I've got to send a wire, somehow, some way; my pal, the barkeep, 'd do it if he had the chance. And so—"

"I've already sent it," the girl told him simply. "Now you go to sleep. I'll wake you if—if I should need protection"—her smile probed Annister's abashed glance like a lance of light—"and now you go to sleep."

Annister awoke to the sound of soft breathing somewhere in the dark, and with it the first faint fingers of the dawn upon the hills. Testing his shoulder, he found it stiff and a little sore; but the wound had been but a flesh-wound; in a day or two, thanks to his excellent condition, it would be as good as ever; he would be his own man with the rising of another sun.

Lowering himself gingerly over the edge of the bunk, he found that he could stand upright; then, taking a rifle from a rack of two behind the door, he went onward slowly along the forest path.

A face like the face of a devil, seamed and twisted with passion, peered outward from a bush, the stock of a Winchester cradled against his cheek—the face of the killer, Idaho. A moment he stared outward at the tall figure on the trail; then, grinning his cold grin, his finger was tightening on the trigger. Then, as if he had heard something that Annister had not, he vanished. A minute passed; then five; then down-wind there came the flat crack of a rifle like the breaking of a stick.

He was perhaps a half mile from the cabin; by this time, as it seemed to him, the girl must be awake; perhaps, discovering him gone, she might find cause for worry; he had better be getting back.

And it was then that with the flat crack of the rifle he stood for a breathing instant like a man turned to stone. For, hard upon its echo,

down-wind in the crisp morning air, there had come, on a sudden, the high scream of a woman.

ANNISTER, the blood pounding in his temples, broke into a lurching run. That high-pitched call—he would have known it among a thousand!

His wound had opened; he could feel the slow stain spreading, soaking into his shirt. The rifle, a dead weight cumbering his rush, he flung from him as, rounding a granite outcropping, he saw—and seeing, cursed once, a man's clean oath, or he thought that he did; but the sound was little better than a croak.

There in the cabin doorway he saw the girl.

Facing her, but with his back to Annister, with his short bow-legs and long arms, simian in their suggestion of the brute, stood Idaho; Annister, although he could not see it, could feel the grin, the lecherous lips lifted above the stained and broken teeth.

And like a broken lily, a pale and crownless rose, a handkerchief across her mouth, wrists bound together with a rawhide thong, she saw Annister even at the moment that the killer, wheeling to the right-about, swung up his gun, a poisonous, grim smile on his wide mouth.

Aware that the girl, armed, hearing the shot that would have accounted for the operative, might have been a danger, Idaho had held his hand back there on the trail, for he had been certain that the operative would return. But he had not counted upon Annister's speed, disabled as he was.

The killer's pistol went up and out; it roared twice, the double report blending into one, as Annister, shortening his stride, dove as a football player dives, low and hard, beneath those guns; his left arm, like an iron bar, drove down, steel fingers hooking into the man's ankles; he grunted, heaved, and the killer rose as if on wings to fall, as a tree fails, backward upon the rock.

Annister heard from the girl a choking cry, and through a crimson mist, weaving, out almost upon his feet, he beheld Idaho rising to his knees. He saw the stiff hand, claw-like, reach in a lightning stab for the fallen pistol; it seemed to hang for a split-second, motionless; it was like a slow-motion picture, Annister thought; there was the killer's hand, reaching for the pistol; in a moment he would grasp it—and Annister was unarmed.

And then as the killer's fingers closed upon the pistol something burst in Annister's brain with a singing crash; the veins in his neck and temples stood out in ridges; he straightened, hurling himself forward at full length as the gun crashed almost in his face.

He felt the searing passage of the bullet like the blow of a giant hand; he felt his hat lift, blown backward as in a wind of death; then, lunging at full length, his fist had landed on the killer's cheek-bone with a spanking thud.

Idaho's head went backward with a snap; his face grayed to a sort of gray-green pallor, the pistol flew out and up, jerked from his stiff fingers with the motion. Then all at once his eyes turned inward with a dreadful squint; a bloody froth edging his stiff lips, he lurched, stumbled, recovered—to fall, face downward, upon the rock.

Annister, rising to his knees, got slowly to his feet. Staggering like a man drunk, for a moment the rock-face heaved and pitched beneath him like a sea. He gazed downward at the

killer, moistening his dry lips. Idaho was dead, his neck broken by the terrific impact of that socking punch. He turned sidewise to the girl.

A quick knife-slash and she was free. The gag removed, she faced him now, gaze misty-bright, with, between them at that high moment, a silence that was like a stone dropped in the still waters of a mountain pool. Then like the dawn upon dim peaks, her face under his gaze turned slowly, rose, her hand went out, touching him upon the forehead.

"You came!" she said low, and the words were not so much a question as a statement of fact. "I knew that you would come to help me.

"Your shoulder!" she breathed. "Now lean on me—so—oh—be careful, please!"

And again in the shack and in his bunk Annister, drifting between dreams, heard, as from dim leagues of distance, her voice out of the shadows:

"Your shoulder—it'll be all right in a day or two—but it will take some mending."

Following the coming of Idaho, for a long, golden week Annister lay passive, at the end of the seventh day rising with the setting of the sun to stand with the girl upon the flat rock that overlooked the Basin, and Fredonia set like a bandbox village on the plain.

Together they made their plans, Annister turning to the girl after a moment with a sudden smile:

"Partner," he said; then with a fleeting grin: "Partner—I like that! But, as it happens, I do not even know your name."

The girl gazed at him with a sudden affectation of primness, but her eyes, under their smooth, golden brows, shone as to their depths with a quick-leaping spark.

"Number Thirty-three, if you please, sir," she told him primly. "And yours?"

"You have it," he said, and again, eye to eye, they laughed together on a low, brooding note.

Annister, walking beside the girl, felt all at once a sudden bleakness of the spirit that was like death. What if she did not care for him? And he, hard-bitten, a wanderer in the waste places of the earth, an Ishmael, with his hand against every man's—who was he that he should look for it?

Then abruptly there seemed the rushing thunder of stampeding hoofs.

They looked, and down upon them in the narrow way they saw the long-riders, Rooker in the lead.

CHAPTER IV

ANNISTER RIDES ALONE

THEY heard a yell, high, savage, snarling, between the highways as the bandit leader's horse charged down.

"There they are! Now go get 'em!" and the pounding of the hoofs as, almost abreast, the lawyer-bandit, his dark face with its transverse scar, savage, exultant, threw down his gun.

Annister at the first sight of the horsemen had put the girl behind him, bringing up his gun. But in the face of that overwhelming attack he knew that it would avail him little. One or two, perhaps, he might account for, and then, bestriding their horses they would ride him down—ay, and the girl.

The leader's gun crashed even as the operative, firing beneath the flash, saw his horse rear, heard above the noise of the hoofs the high-pitched, snarling oath; saw where his bullet had struck home, the gun hand dripping red—then, as a dream seen in a mist, the riders had come level;

two riding, bit to bit, swerving abruptly to the left, bore down upon him and the girl.

He pulled the trigger, but his hammer clicked upon an empty magazine; then he hurled outward and away as the foremost of the horses struck him fair.

He lurched, recovered, going to his knees as a burst of bullets tore through the place where he had been, to see, as the long-riders swept onward, the two leaning from their saddles, spur forward on either side the girl.

And between them, as Annister got stiffly to his feet, he saw her on a sudden lifted, swung; then, with the pound of hoof-beats they were away.

ANNISTER, with a heart like lead in his breast, heard the diminishing echo of those hoof-beats vanish from less to less, die into silence—a silence that was like a vacuum of sound and sense. He cursed once, a bitter, brooding malediction, wasting no time, however, in vain self-reproach, but making what speed he might backward to the hut.

He forced himself to a hard-held calm as, going forward to the shack, he found the car as they had left it, the tank three-quarters full. He could not follow them along that trail unmounted, but he could make speed downward to Fredonia and the one man, if he was still alive, who might give aid. Loading his pistol, as also the remaining Winchester, he threw in the clutch and the car shot forward down the long road to the town.

Driving like a man possessed, with ever at his back the specter of his fear riding him like a goad, he reached the single street, roared down it, his keen gaze upon its echoing, empty dust.

It was as if the town emptied overnight, he thought, and with it he had an impression as of a stage set and waiting, for what he could not have told.

He jammed on the brakes, leaving his engine running to burst in at the hotel entrance at the double-quick. For a moment he could see nothing; then, at a voice out of the darkness, his heart leaped up:

"Annister—well, jumpin' horned toads!"

It was the "bartender."

Annister told him the story in a quick rush of words; then, at the other's wondering exclamation, he made a quick, sudden turn:

"Shoot, Harvey!" he exploded. "What's it mean? The town — are they all dead? What's happened—and for God's sake, man—hurry!"

The "bartender" grimaced.

"Sho!" he said. "There's sure been hell a-poppin', with th' lid off, and then some! Rooker raised merry blazes the way you run that whizzer on him at Benrimo's place; he was sure fit to be tied. And then it seems somehow they got wind that the deputies were coming — Easley and the rest—must've been a leak somewhere; and so, sharp at sunup, they pulled their freight, a-fannin' and a-foggin' f'r th' Tontos—I got it straight."

He paused, pouring three fingers neat. Annister made an explosive, quick comment. Harvey went on:

"I got t' stay here—you know that, Steve—but I listened in, and I know that Rooker was dead set for Number Thirty-Three"—he paused—"no, he wasn't wise to who she is, but he must have figured where you'd gone. As I overheard it, they aimed to find her, eliminate you in the process, and then he and Westervelt and Shorty—six or eight of 'em altogether—were

to ride for that old hang-out under Sentinel Butte, the rest to scatter, meeting later north of Jackson's Hole."

Again he paused; drank, resuming, at Annister's quick head-shake:

"Well, I sure thought that you had cashed, partner," he was beginning, but Annister, turning with the word, his face averted, put out his hand.

"I'm going," he said. "I'll find her; but if I don't come back, I'm leaving 'em to Easley and you."

He flung out a hand and was gone. The bartender, listening, heard from the stable at the rear the quick beat of hoofs; then, passing the hotel entrance at a pounding run, horse and rider had disappeared into the grim fastness to the north.

AS HE rode onward at a stretching run Annister was not thinking of that which he must do, but of the girl.

He was soon entering a dry, sandy wash, on either hand high walls of sandstone rising sheer. It behooved him to be careful now; they might conceivably have set a man on watch; perhaps at that moment from the cliff-face just above he might be lying hidden, Winchester trained upon the horseman riding up the wash.

Dismounting in the shadow of a dense stand of spruce, the operative, circling the trees, brought his binoculars to bear upon the butte, distant scarcely half a mile; its long shadow split by a deep cleft in which, as the watcher knew, hidden from the gaze of the passer-by without, there was a cabin built of heavy logs.

At first he could see nothing, but in a moment as he looked a man had dropped suddenly from the shadow to the light. At that distance he seemed immovable, moving no faster than the minute-hand of a watch, but through his glasses Annister could see the alert movement of his head, the dragging shuffle, as he turned backward to the hut.

It was Shorty.

Annister was wearing two guns now; they were strapped down on either side, well forward, for greater freedom of action, the custom of the two-gun man; and as a gun fighter Annister, as a line-rider in the old times, had been more than fair.

He turned now, climbing upward across the slippery shale until with the red butte on his left, and distant not more than two hundred yards, he halted, waiting for the night.

Twice as he lay there rigid as a rock he saw two men come out, gaze for a long minute into the south, and then vanish in the shadows of the cleft. Then, with the setting of the sun, he stirred for the first time, getting stiffly to his feet.

In perhaps ten minutes it would be over, he reflected grimly—over, either way—the sands were running out; it was a hundred-to-one chance that he would win; but as a gambler staking his all on the hazard of a last, desperate cast, Annister went forward now, invisible in the thick darkness, until, deep in that riven gash he halted abruptly, as a line of light cut through the darkness in a swift stab of flame.

A door had opened, closed; it had given him the direction of the shack toward which, moving with the stealth and caution of an Indian, he crawled now on his hands and knees, until close against the wall he heard the low, growling murmur of voices and the click of cards.

Annister was at the rear. And as to the cabin he was aware of something that the men inside were not: a sliding panel, a long board; shoulder-width, it ran upward to the

height of a tall man, and beyond it; Annister, his fingers sliding upon the wood, grinned in the darkness as for a brief instant he felt it give, bending a little inward with his slow, silent touch.

Through a crack in the board he had a good view of the room and of the men within it, but he breathed deep as, facing him across the long room, eyes wide and staring, mouth set in the compression of a chill despair, he saw the girl.

She had been lashed upright against the log wall with a ruthless hand, while intent upon their game the six men at the table shuffled and dealt, drank from the brown bottle passing from hand to hand; the operative counted them: six—but it was enough.

Still he waited in a sort of iron calm, his fingers reaching upon that board, eye to the crack. His moment was almost come. And it came now with the voice of Rooker, snarling above his cards:

"Where's Idaho—ha? He's late, because in the morning we'll be moving on to 'fresh fields'—ha, Westervelt? But that's an allusion you wouldn't understand! Now—"

With the bottle at his lips, Westervelt dealing, Shorty, both hands on the table in plain sight, the others intent upon the cards—it was the moment for which Annister had waited. Now the panel fell inward with a crash, and through the opening Annister, guns out, burst into the room.

HE CAME shooting, the ripping crashes of his guns roaring in the narrow room like a swift thunder; his gun-hand vomited lightning unbelievably swift—and at that short distance it was impossible to miss.

His first shot, aimed at Rooker, would have struck the leader fair, save that, upon the instant, the lawyer had bent forward in his seat. It drilled the mestizo through the forehead even as Annister's second shot struck the Albino's shoulder, whirling him off balance to a slumbering fall.

Dazed for the moment, for the tenth of a whirling second the longriders sat rigid in their seats; then hell burst with the crashing of the guns.

It was now four to one, but the four no common men, but killers, past-masters of the art indeed; the operative's life hung by a hair as, diving beneath the flashes of the guns, his hand, reaching, had upended the table; behind it now he shot, and his bullets found their marks.

Never during a lifetime of hazard had he been called upon to the last limit of his skill as in this tempest of death which hemmed him round, driving him all ways at once; but the miracle could not endure, he knew.

The mestizo lay where he had fallen, perhaps three paces in his front; further on a giant with a broken nose and a hard mouth snarling and grim even in death. Shorty, his back against the wall, sat nursing his injured knee. Annister's pistols had taken a heavy toll.

And now, as Westervelt, his lips set in a twisted grin, leaned forward, Annister, crouching behind that table, saw on a sudden the lawyer's hand flash sidewise and down; the heavy knife, thrown by a practiced hand, sang past his ear as Westervelt, leaping forward with a curse, had fired twice point-blank.

Annister saw him come even as the heavy table rose as if on wings; it hurtled forward, crashing them against the wall. The officer, gun out,

waited, but there came no sound, no sign. Then, jerking the table backward, he looked—and a grim smile was born about his mouth.

Tucson Charlie Westervelt, victor in a score of desperate gun-battles, lay huddled beneath the window, unmarked save for the bruising impact of that crushing blow. And Rooker, bad man extraordinary, whom no man, so it was reported, had fought and lived to tell of it—Rooker was gone!

Annister, glancing at the shattered window, saw and understood. He turned now to the girl, a pulse in his temple throbbing with a quick violence; his knife went out, and in a moment she was in his arms.

"You came!" she murmured low. "Ah, I knew that you would!"

But peril, racing with the racing seconds, drove them to action now, with the need for speed and yet more speed. Rooker was gone, but he would return leader of a score. Annister, leading the way outward to the horses, they chose two, mounted and were away into the darkness at a stretching run. Passing the stand of spruce where he had left the animal he had ridden from the town, he cast loose the picket-pin; then, once more in motion, he led the way upward along the trail until, mile high above the level floor of the desert, he drew rein, turning to the girl. His words were brief, prosaic, matter-of-fact:

"Rooker'll be burning the wind," he told her, unslinging his binoculars, "and he'll be after us, certain sure! Our one chance is Easley; he'll be about due, and Rooker knows it, and he's pulling his freight. But he'll pick us up on the wing, if he can do it. Now I'll have a look-see."

A long moment he gazed, then, his face somber, handed the glasses to the girl.

"He's coming, if I'm any judge," he said simply. "See that moving shadow against the white? Horses! And they are headed this way."

In confirmation of his words the moon, rising behind a cloud-bank in the west, showed them, as at the lifting of a curtain, that moving cloud, and out of it now even as they watched there came all at once a bright, twinkling flash — another —like distant heliographs: moonlight upon the barrels of the guns.

Wheeling their horses, they stormed upward along the trail, which presently, a dim ribbon of white, rang hollow with the sound of their hoof-beats pounding upon stone.

Daylight was reddening the peaks when, just ahead, they saw it; a natural fortress hewn from the solid rock, and from this coign Annister, glasses level upon the bench beneath, gazed briefly down. For a long minute, the binoculars in his hand, he sat his horse motionless, his brief, appraising glance upon the beetling scarp above; there was but one way into it, and in that narrow vent one man might hold out against a score.

"They've split," he said. "They'll come at us both ways at once—about twenty altogether, I think. They've got us—like that!"

He opened and closed one muscular, strong hand, the knuckles whitening with the pressure, turning the horses with the word upward among the stones.

"We'll make our stand here," he told her. Then with a sudden, eager glance, dismounting, he leveled a forefinger into the north.

"By Godfrey, I never thought of it!" he snapped. "There—to the north! We couldn't make it, both; but you, partner, ride! You can

make it around above the Tonto; I'll hold 'em long enough for that!"

But the girl surveyed him with a level look.

"No!" she said, the single syllable. Then: "I can handle a gun! At any rate, I can load one. Why don't you try me and see?"

This girl, of fire and ice compounded, Annister thought; this girl, who could ride as a man rides, handle a gun like a man, and with it abate not one shading of her feminine allure—she was a partner to be proud of!

Under his gaze, frankly admiring a something close, she flushed, but her eyes met his with a grave, steady sweetness, on her lips the shadow of a smile. They entered that narrow cleft now, Annister leading, and with the horses bestowed within the wall, waited in a tension growing with the seconds for the attack which would not be long in coming, they knew.

The horsemen had disappeared.

And then a hand's-breadth from his ear there came a cracking thud; the bullet dropping out of the sky with the vicious put-t of its two-thousand-pound impact against the rock. With the high whine of the slug the report cracked faintly without echo.

CHAPTER V

THE SERPENT IN THE GRASS

ANNISTER, peering beneath his hand, saw from the dark line of pinons at the canyon's edge a faint wisp of smoke, ballooning upward in the still, silent air. Then, all along the trees there burst the rolling rattle of the reports.

In that eyrie, under the pitiless sun, they were beset now on all sides at once; the droning shriek of the high velocities streamed into the wind with, after a moment, yells, high, savage, like the fierce challenge of hounds in at the death.

Water they had none; food barely sufficient to last them, at half rations, till sundown; but of ammunition they had a-plenty. Annister had brought with him the rifles, .44-70's; he thrust the barrel of his gun outward now across the rock as in his ear he heard the crash of the girl's weapon and a high-pitched answering yell.

Then, leaping full-length clear, a man, gun held high, burst up and outward from the boskage, to fall, in an aimless huddle of sprawling limbs, face downward upon the trail. And as if this had been a signal the staccato rattle of the rifles came with the tearing impact of the slugs; they thudded in from every angle as, all at once, running figures, stooping, fanned out from right to left.

Annister, emptying his rifle, pumping the gun with the speed and precision of machine-gun fire, vented a quick, explosive "Ha!" as, from right to left, his bullets found their marks.

At his side the girl, loading and firing with fingers steady as a rock, had scored once, twice, a thick-set fellow with the broad face of a breed, rolling and tumbling almost beneath the scarp. In a lull of the firing Annister could see his face with its snarling grin, frozen in death as, abruptly from the rock wall at their backs, there came a savage shout.

It rose high, exultant as, with a quick glance at his left, the operative found only empty space, the girl had gone. And then even as he leaped, turning to face this new danger threatening at their backs, he heard, punctuating that yell, the thunderous, long roar of a heavy Colt. It was the girl.

ANNISTER saw the face, with its flat cheekbones and wide grinning mouth, uprise above the bastion at their rear, saw the pistol in the huge, hairy hand rise, come down, hang for the tenth of a second above him against the sky. Then he saw the pistol in the girl's hand go out and up; it roared twice—and the grim face was blotted out. Her voice came high above the clang and rattle, silver-clear:

"We're holding 'em, partner! And we'll keep 'em that way! Now!"

Her pistol crashed as there came a high-pitched, strangled scream. Annister, his eyes about him all ways at once, upon that dark line of cover and the No-Man's Land that lay between, scowled in the bright sunlight, narrowing his gaze upon the dead and wounded just below.

The long shadows had become longer; with the setting of the sun he knew well enough that under cover of the night they would attack in force. And thinking of the girl, he felt for a moment his bones turn to water with the knowledge of that which was to come.

For himself he knew that he did not greatly care. His life, forfeit twenty times over, was—just a life—an infinitesimal, brief atom in the great scale of life and of death. But thinking of the girl, braver than a man, and yet, indeed, feminine and fine and true, he felt his heart sink and a weakness like death come on him in a sudden chill despair.

The firing had lessened now to single shots. Presently, however, all along their front it rose in a fresh fury, running in a quick, sudden burst, from right to left. Now at their left, and hidden from their view by a thick stand of spruce, there came a quick, sliding ripple, like the passage of a snake.

It was a human form. The jet eyes glittered as the half-naked body slowly and sinuously moved forward with scarcely a rustle of the grass.

Knife in his teeth, the sliding figure came onward, yard by stealthy yard, invisible beneath the bracken, face in a snarling, fixed grin above the great blade of the knife. Now the man came onward—up and up—until, halting in the dense shadow of a manzanita clump, his bare toes sought and found their purchase for the spring.

And behind him, and a little to his right, there showed all at once a second figure, full length, appearing suddenly as if out of the air; to the watchers in the boskage just below he was invisible, as was the first.

The two behind their barrier had not seen. Then all at once there came a scrambling rush, a thud, the slither of bare feet upon stone. Annister, whirling, beheld, too late, the fierce face with its flat cheek-bones and wide, grinning mouth. The Indian, great blade out-thrust for a moment, his muscles bunching for the spring, hung beneath earth and heaven; then he was inside.

CHAPTER VI

RAINBOW'S END

ANNISTER, his pistol out of reach, clubbing his rifle, swung it in a short arc. And then at a quick grunt from the Indian, he checked, halting the down-stroke in mid-air. For the brave, waving his dripping blade on high, held up his hand, palm outward, his thick speech like the hissing of a snake:

"Me Hualpai — amigo — ai!" he said. "Me catch-um snake-in-the-grass, you savvy?" He made a quick down-stroke with the knife, gestur-

ing backward along the way which he had come. He grinned as, from the direction of the plain there came a quick flare of shots; then silence; then—and Annister heard it as a man hearing a reprieve from death—a distant hoarse cheer.

In the revulsion of this sudden turn Annister, leaning against the wall, laughed, but the laugh was more a croak.

"Easley with help!" he said. "Thank God!"

And now, all round the mountain, with the roll and rattle of the reports, the long-riders, in their turn beset, swung to their saddles, spurring along the trail.

Westervelt, his high white sombrero shining in the sun, rode first; behind him, bending almost to the saddle-bow, came Rooker; even at that distance Annister fancied he could see the snarling grin as, streaking for the turn, he galloped away.

Bellies near earth, the cow-ponies whirled, back-jumping along the narrow way; dark faces grim, the long-riders, racing for the turn, were almost through; the deputies, flung in a wide circle, had not yet closed. Then, filling the narrow way, they came thunderous, the rattle of their carbines sharp above the swift thunder of the hoofs.

Caught between two fires, the long-riders wavered, came on; then they were whirled backward in the vortex of a cursing tangle of swift motion; the dust, billowing upward in a choking cloud, hung in the still air like a pall, out of which the red glare of the guns flashed and was gone, with the trampling of the hoofs, the oaths, the close, acrid reek of powder, with, over all, that drifting smoke-cloud eddying from less to less.

Westervelt was down, dying as he had lived; the Albino, carrying two deputies in his rush, had galloped clear. Then, even as they watched, the two on the cliff-face saw his horse rear, the rider pitch forward from the saddle even as out of the press came Rooker; his horse in a great leap had cleared the circle; in a moment he would be away.

Abreast the cliff face, his face dark with hate, the bandit-leader flung out his hand; his gun roared even as the girl, with a tired sigh, leaned forward to slump downward against the wall.

But Annister, with a face like death, steadied the rifle downward across the rock. With the bandit's horse almost upon the turn, and rocketing forward in a sudden burst, he made a target dwindling from less to less. But as man flips a loose coin in air, Annister, almost, without aim, as it had seemed, had fired.

The Indian, leaning outward from the scarp, yelled as, with the double report, horse and rider, as if blown backward by the impact of a giant hand, checked, halted—then somersaulted backward in a plunging fall. Allison Rooker, in the full measure of his sins, had gone to his account.

But Annister, shaken with the quick wind of his grief, turned now to the girl. Tender as any woman he lifted her, her head against his breast, his voice broken, in the quick tide of his passion and despair.

How like a broken lily she seemed! There in his arms, voiceless and pale, with never an answer to the words which, as if by some magic of love's desperate need might hold her there, to laugh, as it might be, at death.

The deputies were coming back; the fight was over; alone now for a brief interval together, and for the last time—ah, it would be the

last time, and the first! He bent then, kissing the cold lips reverently, to hold her close for a moment in an agony of self-reproach.

"Partner!" he breathed.

And then, as if that kiss were magic, if the words were not, he saw, and believed not in the seeing, the sudden flush; her eyes opened; her slim fingers, reaching, had touched his cheek.

Then, placing his hand on the crisp curls, she smiled.

"A scratch," she told him. "It will heal."

At a little distance, Annister could see the deputies, Easley in the lead. In a moment their moment would be over. In the grip of a strange, sudden, overmastering constraint, he stammered, halted, then with a strange hoarseness spoke:

"Will you—I know it's sudden—but—partner, can't we be——"

Abruptly he felt a contact that was like a burning snowflake upon his lips as, from the safe shelter of his arms he had his answer:

"Ah—partners—for always!" said the girl.

WESTERN ACTION

MARCH ISSUE FEATURES
2 GREAT NEW NOVELS
"THE GUN KING OF THUNDER VALLEY"
By ARCHIE JOSCELYN
"DEPUTY FROM TEXAS"
By G. W. BARRINGTON
ALSO SHORT STORIES

COMPLETE NORTHWEST NOVEL Magazine

MARCH ISSUE FEATURES
2 GREAT NEW NOVELS
"LAW OF THE MOUNTED"
By CLIFF CAMPBELL
"BANDITS RULE THE SNOW FRONTIER"
By BRIAN LOOMIS
ALSO SHORT STORIES BY
SAMUEL TAYLOR
AND OTHER LEADING WRITERS

POWDER PAYMENT FOR PAYROLL SNATCHERS

by HARRISON G. STREETER

An ex-Pinkerton cattle detective plays an explosive sort of game with a gang of stage robbers

BILL GRIERSON strode into the private office of the general manager of the Rowland Mining Company, sat down, produced a cigar and coolly prepared to smoke. Herbert Lane, the G. M., looked up at the intrusion and the annoyed frown gathering on his brow changed to a smile of welcome.

Grierson's cigar drew well. He blew a cloud of aromatic smoke at the ceiling, lowered his gaze and fas-

tened the other with a look of inquiry.

"Well, what's bitin' you?" he shot abruptly.

For answer Lane pushed a telegram and a letter across the desk toward him. Bill took the telegram first. Incidentally, it was the older of the two. It read:—

"Herbert Lane, G. M.
Rowland Mining Co.,
Gunsight:
Robbery of stage and $25,000 of our gold reported. Letter follows.
John Rowland."

Bill Grierson laid down the dispatch and picked up the letter.

"Mr. Herbert Lane, G. M.
Gunsight.
Your report of the stage robbery and $25,000 of our gold is at hand. This is the fourth affair of its kind covering more than $100,000 in three months. The Rowland Company can stand this no longer. I understand that the stage is operated by you under name of the Rowland Company. Therefore the responsibilities for these losses fall upon your shoulders alone. I regret to inform you that another affair of this nature will result in your replacement as G. M. by a man capable of meeting the situation.
Very truly,
John Rowland.
P. S. Regards to Sidney. Tell him I may see him soon."

Bill Grierson read these missives through without change of countenance. He was a hard-boiled cowman having formerly been a successful member of the Pinkerton Agency. He had come from his ranch fifty miles distant at an urgent request of the general manager.

He glanced across the desk at Lane. His features were an unreadable mask.

"Well."

"You have the layout, at least the most of it," returned Lane grimly. "The rest is this. I am offering $10,000 from the company, there's $10,000 more from the state and I am willing to put the entire matter in your hands. It's Duke Fosdig's gang without question. Sheriff Blount seems to be entirely powerless. These robberies are all pulled in Black Canyon. That's the only way we can get our shipments out to the railroads. You know there are so many favorable places for a hold-up down in that hole that Fosdig can get away with them with little risk to himself. He holes up somewhere back in the Alta Verdes. He is utterly ruthless and the country down there is thoroughly terrorized by him. Every one of these robberies is accompanied by one or more fatalities."

"How come he is able to pick out the exact stage carrying the gold each time?"

"That's the part that's bothering me," returned Lane worriedly. "Only myself and my assistant, Jack Strang, are supposed to know anything about it. We send every stage out under guard so that is no indication as to the cargo."

"What is your procedure in making a shipment?"

"I have to put an order through covering each lot. That is a formality John Rowland, himself, insisted upon when he was out here checking up on the business efficiency of the office. There is some leak from here that gives Duke Fosdig his information. That's clear. But who—that's beyond me."

"Can't you abandon the practice and send out the gold so that only you know when it's going?"

"No, you don't know John Rowland. He's square, especially in his own mind, but try to change any of his pet efficiency ideas and see what happens."

"Must be someone besides Jack Strang who sees those orders. Jack's above suspicion."

"There's just one other who might and it's hard to place blame there."

"Who is it?"

"Sidney Rowland. Old man sent his son out here to straighten him up. Going a pretty fast pace back in New York."

"What kind of a hombre is he?"

"Kind of weak and dissipated but going straight here as far as I know. He's sort of general assistant around the office and has the run of the works. Would hardly think he'd mix up in anything crooked, especially where his dad was concerned."

"Hum-m," grunted Grierson thoughtfully.

"Will you take the case?" queried Lane eagerly.

"Sorta thought I was all through with that kind of thing but I'll do it to accommodate you, Herbert. Get Sheriff Blount to put me on as a special deputy and I'll look around a bit."

HERBERT LANE'S features creased with satisfaction.

"Thought I could count on you, Bill," he nodded. "Now one more thing. We have been afraid to send out any gold since the last hold-up, consequently we've got $100,000 worth in the vault and John Rowland's howling for the output. Got a letter from him this morning I didn't show you."

"Put the order through in the usual way to send it out tomorrow," directed Grierson coolly.

"But—"

"Never mind. Do it," he hesitated thoughtfully. "And by the way, what sort of receptacle do you use for shipping gold?"

"Strong box, only two keys. I have one and the receiving clerk in Rowland's office in New York has the other."

"Good, now have one of these strong boxes put out so I can look it over."

A young man entered the office.

"Young Sidney Rowland," whispered Lane from behind his hand.

Bill Grierson measured the newcomer with his eye long and keenly, then arose to go.

"Write out an order to your stage officials to act on my orders," he said by way of farewell and then strode out.

For four hours Bill Grierson tinkered with one of the gold carrying strong boxes. He selected the company's laboratory for his tinkering and worked behind locked doors. At five o'clock Herbert Lane knocked and was admitted after satisfying Bill of his identity.

"Say," queried Grierson, resting for a moment from his labor. "This Fosdig's a hard case, ain't he?"

"Yeah," returned Lane. "He kills ruthlessly and sometimes unnecessarily. W've buried more than a dozen of my men alone, not to mention other affairs that he's mixed into."

"The only thing for such lobos then is extermination."

"Extermination is the word," returned Lane with a grim nod. "If you can bump him off in any of your wanderings in this country you'll prove a blessing to humanity. The law, even out here is beginning to get lenient."

"Did you put that order for the shipment through?" queried Grierson.

The G. M. nodded.

"Notice anything suspicious?"

"Young Rowland took a walk soon after. I had our detective keep an eye on him."

"Yes," encouraged Grierson.

"He said a few words to a tough

looking hombre outside the eating shack, but that's all."

Grierson nodded. "That's enough," he observed. "Be sure that your man can pick up that fellow. I have a hunch we'll want him later."

"Now listen carefully," he continued after a pause. "At ten o'clock tomorrow, have the stage ready. This box is filled with lead and iron scrap. I'm going to drive it to Gunsight myself and alone—no passengers."

Lane's eyes opened in astonishment. "Why, man, Fosdig'll shoot you like a dog."

"Very well, that's a chance I take. I'll make no resistance and go unarmed except for a rifle under the floor boards. Of course I'll take an armed guard from here to make it look natural, but I'll drop him off at the entrance to Black Canyon."

"Yeah, go on," breathed Lane. "You've got me wondering."

"I'll take a portable telephone under the driver's seat. If I'm held up and come through so I can talk I'll tap the wire and phone you an O. K. That'll mean for you to load that box over there that's got the hundred thousand in gold bars in it and come along without delay. This box I'm carrying will be fastened so tight that Fosdig'll wait till he's back in the mountains before he opens it. In the meantime, I'm figuring he won't be looking for another shipment so soon. Now don't put through another order. John Rowland ought to be satisfied with one and the present order only mentioned tomorrow. It didn't specify what particular time or stage to use."

Lane's eyes gleamed. "Looks possible," he breathed. "That is, if you're not bumped off. Reckon you got some good scheme for getting Fosdig later. Fooling him that way'll make him pretty sore."

"Yeah, we'll see about that later," returned Grierson.

AT TEN o'clock the next morning the stage drew up to the office of the Rowland Mining Company. A new driver was in the seat. The heavy strong box was placed inside, an armed guard climbed up beside the driver and they started. It was quickly and rather secretly done.

"Another gold shipment," grunted an off-duty miner winking his eye wisely. "But who's the new driver? I never seen 'im before."

"Me nuther," returned his companion. "He's a stranger. Fosdig's made mince meat of so many of 'em that Lane can't hire no more from around here."

"Poor cuss," sympathized the first. "Maybe he don't know what he's up against."

In an hour Grierson dropped the guard with instructions to stay right where he was until noon and then walk back to the mine.

"But," argued the guard. "Who's t' pertect th' gold, then?"

"You'd only get shot anyway," returned Grierson. "If Fosdig's there he'll have his gang with him. If he isn't I won't need you."

The astonished guard climbed down wonderingly and stood watching the swaying conveyance as it rumbled down the first sharp grades of Black Canyon.

"Well, Lane said t' obey orders," he apologized to himself, "an' if that locoed hombre wants t' face Fosdig alone it's his funeral, not mine." And he crawled into the shade of a pinyon, stretched out comfortably and dozed.

Bill Grierson drove down the winding trail. On either side of him arose steep rugged walls and at their

bases were many great tumbled piles of rocks fallen down during the ages past. At times trees of cottonwood and ash grew singly or in clumps and thickets of mesquite and desert scrub covered much of the bottom beside the trail.

He drove carefully scanning one likely covert after another. Even his sharp lookout did not detect hostile presence. He had traversed five miles of the gloomy depths before anything happened.

Suddenly a rifle shot split the silence. The foot board splintered and a bullet whizzed through the conveyance. He jammed down the brake and held it with his foot. Another shot and his hat tugged slightly. His hands went up but still another bullet whistled past his ear before anyone appeared.

Two masked men climbed down from behind a rock.

"Why don't yuh go fer your gun, you yeller livered coyote?" rasped one harshly. "Yuh 'fraid a gittin' yer hide punctured?"

Grierson remained silent while one of the outlaws felt over him for weapons, and then in surprise felt again.

"What's th' idee?" he growled. "You're gettin' plum' trustful. Who are ye anyhow?"

"New driver," returned Grierson. "Figured if you was after the stuff you'd get it anyhow."

"How come they ain't no guard?"

"He dropped off back up th' canyon."

"Plum' cowards," rasped Fosdig who had now come up with the remainder of the bandits. "Ain't they got no more real men up at th' Rowland?"

Grierson remained silent while the bandit glared. His bloodthirsty soul was unsatisfied.

Drink Habit

Just put tasteless **Cravex** in his coffee, tea, liquor or food. His craving for Whiskey, Beer or Wine should be relieved. New, proven treatment—physician's prescription. Tones nerves—aids nature. Safe, doesn't upset stomach. Thousands benefited. Satisfaction guaranteed. Mailed postpaid in plain wrapper for $1.00. C. O. D. if desired, plus a few cents additional charge. **CRAVEX CO., Dept. 210, P. O. Box 942, Burbank, Calif.**

Song Poem Writers

SEND FOR FREE Rhyming Dictionary and Writers Guide. Submit best poems, melodies today for our bonafide superior OFFER.

M M M MUSIC PUBLISHERS, PORTLAND, OREGON

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

Of FAMOUS WESTERN MAGAZINE published Bimonthly at Holyoke, Mass. for Oct. 1, 1937.

State of New York
County of New York ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Abner J. Sundell, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the FAMOUS WESTERN MAGAZINE and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations.

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Name of—	Post office address—
Publisher Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc.	60 Hudson St., N. Y. C.
Editor Mat Rand	60 Hudson St., N. Y. C.
Managing Editor Mat Rand	60 Hudson St., N. Y. C.
Business Manager Abner J. Sundell	60 Hudson St., N. Y. C.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc.	60 Hudson St., N. Y. C.
Samuel Dinerman	60 Hudson St., N. Y. C.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.)

None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ABNER J. SUNDELL

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 11th day of October, 1937.

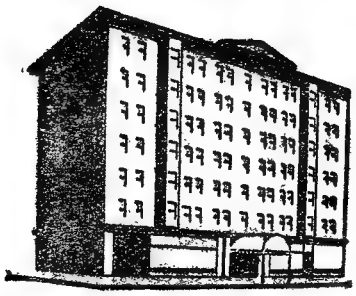
MAURICE COYNE

[SEAL.]

(My commission expires March 30, 1938.)
Bronx County Clerk No. 90.

HOTEL DRAKE
ATLANTIC CITY, N. J.

South Carolina Avenue at Pacific



European Plan Hotel—Moderate Rates
150 Outside Rooms. Beautifully Furnished
Convenient to Piers, Theaters and
Churches. Also Bus and Railroad
Depot. Garage Accommodations.

For Literature & Rates, Address

W. Graham Ferry, Mgr.

SPECIAL FACTORY SALE $7.95
GERMAN AUTOMATICS
(.25 Caliber Only)

Finest blued steel; accurate; hard shooting; safety; brand new; made with the usual German thoroughness and finely finished.
"DREYSER"—7 shot (vest pocket size); wt. 14 oz., 4½" overall. (Regular $9.95) Special....$7.95.
"LANGENHAN"—7 shot; same size as above Special $8.45. 9 shot; 5½" overall; wt. 18 oz. (Regular $10.95) ..... $8.95.
"SCHMEIZER" —(Haenel) 7 shot, vest pocket size; finest quality made; wt. 13 oz.; 4½" overall (Reg. $20) Special $10.95.
Holsters: Automatic 75c; Revolver 95c; Shoulder—$1.75.
Cartridges: 25 cal. 65c per 25. $2 Deposit required on C.O.D's.
None sold to minors. New Fall Bargain Catalog. S&W. Colts. Rifles, Air Guns, Telescopes, Binoculars, etc. Send 3c stamp.
LEE SALES CO. (Dept.SX) 95 W. 32nd St., New York City

MEN
WOMEN WOMEN WOMEN
SAVE DOUBLE 50%
GUARANTEED MERCHANDISE
Complete Line—Drug Sundries of Every Description Superior 100% A-1 Quality Products. Buy direct from us and Save Money. Prices made possible only due to our tremendous buying Power. Trial 25c. Special Generous Sample Asst. $1.00. Plain Sealed Pkg. marked "Personal." Try our latest scientific controlling formula. Trial 50c. Economy size $1.00. RE-NU-PEP Energy builders $1.00. World-famous nationally advertised Zonitors, individually packed, $1.00 Box. Catalog 101 illustrated items 10c. Confidential service.
WONDER SALES SERVICE, Dept. DA-2
1420 N. Spaulding Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SAVE 75%

Order your Drug Sundries direct through our Mail kinds of Specialties for men and women. All personal articles sent postpaid by us in plain sealed wrappers. Write today for **FREE** illustrated catalog. Sell to doctors and druggists.
REX DRUG CO., Dept. 69-A, 201 E. 35th St., Chicago, Ill.
REX DRUG CO., Dept. 69-J, 201 E. 35th St., Chicago, Ill.

"Well take that anyhow fer luck." His ham-like fist smashed against the jaw of the defenseless prisoner and he went down for the count.

"Now get busy an' hustle that box outa there," Fosdig directed his men.

In a quarter hour the strong box, lashed securely to a pack saddle, was ascending a draw through the rim rock of Black Canyon closely escorted by a dozen outlaws. Back on the trail beside the abandoned stage Bill Grierson stirred, opened his eyes and glanced cautiously about. Satisfied that he was alone he pulled back the cover to the driver's seat, took from it a portable phone, drew a rifle from under the floor boards and stole quickly off up the canyon. Half a mile away he made connection with the low hung wire. O. K., he reported to the voice on the other end and then trudged slowly off toward the head of the canyon.

Three hours later a second stage clattered down the Black Canyon trail. They stopped at sight of a lone figure standing in the middle of the road but, recognizing Grierson, came on. Herbert Lane was on the stage with a rifle across his knees.

"Hullo, Bill," he greeted pleasantly. "Glad to see you're able to walk."

"Yeah, but I aim to ride. Just take one of those mounted guards and put him inside."

"What you going to do?"

"Take a little ride up toward the Alta Verdes. At daybreak tomorrow have Sheriff Blount at Pilot Knob over there. I'll be there waiting for you."

"Wh-what—"

"Never mind, do as I say. Be sure he has a posse, with him."

Lane nodded and rode on. His acquaintance with the ex-Pinkerton made him know that he had a suf-

ficient reason for his singular action and he let it go at that.

WHEN the sun went down, Grierson stood behind a rock near the summit of Pilot Knob scanning the country toward the Alta Verdes through a pair of binoculars. His vigil continued until after midnight. Then a phenomenon occurred far over on the slopes of the mountains which satisfied him. He prepared the softest bed he could find between two rocks and slept until dawn.

Sunrise brought the sheriff and a numerous posse. Among them was Herbert Lane. They found Bill Grierson waiting for them at the foot of Pilot Knob.

"Know where you're goin'?" queried the sheriff.

"Pretty much," nodded Grierson and he led them north silently.

It was nearly noon when they cleared the foothills and climbed the slopes of the Alta Verdes. Great rocky abutments and cross canyons cut the upended country in every direction. It was wild and rugged in the extreme—an ideal hiding place for outlaws.

Grierson led them to a narrow rocky gulch leading back into the cliffs. At a hint from him Blount detached riders to comb the ridge on either side and keep a wary eye out for possible surprise. A half hour later they stood in the broadened bottom and gazed forward in astonishment.

Before a cave back under the cliffs the earth had been swept clear as by a tremendous explosion. Remnants of a log hut lay strewn about over the floor of the gulch. There were also gruesome fragments.

"Well, I'll be blowed," breathed Herbert Lane. "Bill, whatever happened, do you suppose?"

FALSE TEETH
60 DAYS TRIAL

I have thousands of satisged customers all over the country who could not aqord to pay big prices. I have been making dental plates for many years, by mail. I guarantee you satisfaction they do not cost you one cent, and I take your word. Teeth made especially for you personally can be tried for sixty days. In one Pennsylvania town alone, 91 people are wearing teeth made by me. They are satisfied and have saved money.

SEND NO MONEY

My plates are very beautiful to look at and are constructed to give life-long service and satisfaction. You can look younger at once. They are made with pearly white genuine porcelain teeth. Well fitting and guaranteed unbreakable. Remember you

FREE do not send one cent—just your name and address, and we send free impression material and full detailed directions. Be sure to write today for my low prices and complete information. Don't put this off. Do it today.

DR. S. B. HEININGER, D. D. S.
440 W. Huron St., Dept. 1538, Chicago, Ill.

PILES DON'T BE CUT Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., 533-C2 Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

MYSTERIES

Sensational Offer Unveiling The Secrets Of Life.

All the ages have contributed to make this book the most amazing revelation for modern men and women ever written. This is the truth that every man and woman should know. You owe it to yourself to end ignorance, and to help bring the ones you love into liberty and happiness. The supply is limited and we are making this remarkable offer for only so long as they last. Mail $1.00 and we will send this book.

Stoddingsol Bros. P. O. Box No. 605 Williamsport, Pa.

Suffer Varicose LEG SORES?

WHY suffer pain and misery of Varicose Ulcers, Varicose Veins, Open Leg Sores, Milk or Fever Leg? Send away at once for FREE Booklet—"THE LIEPE METHOD OF HOME TREATMENT" Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. Liepe Methods, Dept. 32-R, 3284 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin

BIG PRICES PAID FOR CERTAIN WANTED COINS

1909 cent $10.00, some silver Dollars $4000, 1864-1865 Indian Head cents $100.00 each, dimes before 1895—$600, liberty head nickels before 1914—$500, encased postage stamps $13.00, some large pennies $2000, half cents—$275.00, paper Money, gold dollars $1300, foreign coins $165, some worth $6000 each. YOU MAY HAVE COINS FOR WHICH WE PAY BIG PREMIUMS. Therefore SEND 15c TODAY for BIG ILLUSTRATED COIN BOOK for certain wanted coins.

NATIONAL COIN CORPORATION (10) Daytona Beach, Florida.

Prostate Sufferers

Prostate gland acute or chronic, rheumatism, kidney and bladder sufferers, send for FREE trial package; amazing results. Endorsed by doctors.

PROSTEX CO., Dept. 85, MIAMI, OKLA.

RADIOS
JOKES
CURIOS
ANIMALS
BOOKS
MAGIC
RINGS
SEEDS
CATALOGUE
3,500 Illustrations
Nearly 600 Pages
4 Color Cov 1¼" Thick
5000 NOVELTIES
Only catalog of its kind in existence. Over 5000 novelties gathered from every corner of the world. Joke articles, puzzles, cameras, firearms, punch boards, live chameleons, musical novelties, unusual books, make-up kits, construction kits, electrical novelties, low priced radios, fireworks, unusual jewelry, unique watches, etc, etc.
24 pages of radio items.
300 pages of joke items.
116 pages of weird books.
24 pages musical items.
44 pages of jewelry.
Banks, cameras, guns.
$1 pocket radio, 25c home mike, 25c cash register, live chameleon, etc.
Send 3c for standard edition or 25c for complete, bound, library edition.
3c
JOHNSON SMITH & CO.
Dept. 862 Detroit, Mich.
Amazings Things You've Never Seen Before

Do You Want A Baby?

HUNDREDS upon hundreds of women from Coast to Coast, formerly childless for years from functional sterility, and even often told they could never have children, ARE NOW PROUD AND HAPPY MOTHERS from knowledge and use of a simple home method—details of which I send FREE on request. Parents are admittedly far happier, healthier, more contented, more prosperous and actually live longer as a class than childless couples! A baby gives the real home spirit and ties a husband and wife in truest enduring love and mutual interests. The majority of discontented, unhappy marriages are those of childless couples. (Copr. 1936)

Get This Knowledge FREE

During my 36 years of practice in functional conditions of women I developed this home method, which is described in my illustrated treatise sent FREE ON REQUEST. It discusses many subjects relating to the female organs and tells how you too may combat your troubles as thousands of others have who reported arrival of babies after being childless for years, and report as well satisfactory relief from the various female troubles amenable to correction by this home method. DR. H. WILL ELDERS, 7th & Felix Sts., Suite 258, ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI.

Enjoy BEAUTIFUL
NATURAL-LOOKING
FALSE TEETH
LOW PRICES
60 DAYS' TRIAL
SEND NO MONEY
Made to order by FIT-RITE improved method BY MAIL, all over world. Finest Quality. MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE YOU WILL BE SATISFIED. We take your word. Catalog and impression material FREE. Write NOW!
UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY
Dept. 293 1555 Milwaukee Avenue Chicago, Ill.

Grierson gazed over the scene broodingly.

heavy charge of T. N. T. in the strong bax along with that scrap iron and lead. It wouldn't go off until they tried to force it open."

"Guess their curiosity didn't last till morning," observed Blount, solemnly.

"Nope," returned Bill. "Saw the flash and heard the explosion from Pilot Knob a little past midnight. That's how I located it."

BILL remained thoughtful for a minute.

"Pretty tough medicine and not at all sporting," he observed at last. "But it's better than losing a dozen or more good men wiping them out."

"Uh huh," agreed the sheriff. "An' nt's some expeditious, too."

GET ACQUAINTED CLUB

Want a wife, husband, or sweetheart?

Members in most cities, coast to coast. Many financially independent, lonely, desire correspondents. Our clientele includes College bred and Professional types. Write, today, for confidential sealed particulars.

R. E. Simpson, Box 1251, Denver, Colo.

LONELY HEARTS

Join the world's greatest social extension bureau.

Happiness awaits you, correspondents everywhere seeking congenial mates. MANY WEALTHY. 37 years of dependable dignified confidential service. Let us arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Quick results guaranteed. Photos, descriptions, introduction Free. Send no money.

STANDARD CLUB, Box C-9, GRAYS LAKE, ILLINOIS

Don't let your manhood fade or your womanhood slip away. Men can gain vigor—women, vivacity with amazing Formula "B" (men). Formula "F" (women). Vitalizes the parts of the body that slow you down. Stimulates them to healthful, normal activity and ability you crave, to enjoy life. A LIBERAL TRIAL SUPPLY sent for 25c to help pay expense, packing and postage. Comes in plain wrapper. Write today.

MERIT PRODUCTS CO., 332 United Bk. Bldg., Cin'ti, O.

FOREST JOBS

available at $125 - $175 per month, steady. Cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Qualify at once.

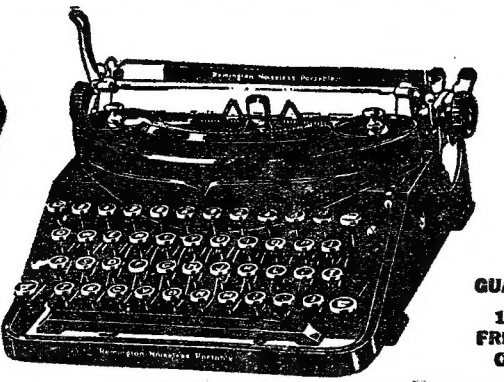
Get details immediately.

Rayson Service Bureau, D-51, Denver, Colo. ©1935

FACTORY TO YOU

NEW REMINGTON NOISELESS PORTABLE

10¢ A DAY



MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

10-DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

AT LAST! The famous Remington Noiseless Portable that speaks in a whisper is available for only 10¢ a day. Here is your opportunity to get a real Remington Noiseless Portable direct from the factory. Equipped with all attachments that make for complete writing equipment. Standard keyboard. Automatic ribbon reverse. Variable line spacer and all the conveniences of the finest portable ever built. PLUS the NOISELESS feature. Act now while this special opportunity holds good. Send coupon TODAY for details.

YOU DON'T RISK A PENNY

We send you the Remington Noiseless Portable direct from the factory with 10 days' FREE trial. If you are not satisfied, send it back. WE PAY ALL SHIPPING CHARGES.

GREATEST TYPEWRITER BARGAIN IN 10 YEARS

The gem of all portables. Imagine a machine that speaks in a whisper . . . that removes all limitations of time or place. You can write in a library, a sick room, a Pullman berth without the slightest fear of disturbing others. And in addition to quiet is a superb performance that literally makes the words seem to flow from the machine. Equipped with all attachments that make for complete writing equipment, the Remington Noiseless Portable produces manifolding and stencil cutting of truly exceptional character. Furnished in black with shining chromium attachments. Mail coupon today!

SPECIFICATIONS. Standard Keyboard. Finished in glistening black with chromium attachments. Takes paper 9.5 inches wide. Writes lines 8.2 inches wide. Standard size, 12 yard ribbon. Makes up to 7 clear, legible carbons. Back spacer. Full size platen. Paper fingers, roller type. Black key cards with white letters. Double shift key and shift lock. Right and left carriage release. Right and left cylinder knobs. Large cushion rubber feet. Single or double space adjustment. All the modern features plus NOISELESS operation.

FREE → TYPING COURSE

With your New Remington Noiseless Portable we will send you—absolutely FREE—a 19-page course in typing. It teaches the Touch System, used by all expert typists. It is simply written and completely illustrated. Instructions are as simple as A, B, C. Even a child can easily understand this method. A little study and the average person, child or adult, becomes fascinated. Follow this course during the 10-Day Trial Period we give you with your typewriter and you will wonder why you ever took the trouble to write letters by hand.

MONEY-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES OPEN. Hundreds of jobs are waiting for people who can type. A typewriter helps you put your ideas on paper in logical, impressive form...helps you write clear, understandable sales reports, letters, articles, stories. A Remington Portable has started many a young man and woman on the road to success.

FREE → CARRYING CASE

Also under this new Purchase Plan we will send you FREE with every Remington Noiseless Portable a special carrying case sturdily built of 3-ply wood. This handsome case is covered with heavy du Pont fabric. The top is removed by one motion, leaving the machine firmly attached to the base. This makes it easy to use your Remington anywhere—on knees, in chairs, on trains. Don't delay... send in the coupon for complete details!

A GIFT FOR ALL THE FAMILY. If you want a gift for birthday, Christmas or Graduation . . . one Father, Mother, Sister or Brother will use and appreciate for years to come . . . give a Remington Noiseless Portable. We will send a Remington Noiseless Portable to anyone you name, and you can still pay for it at only 10c a day. Few gifts are so universally pleasing as a New Remington Noiseless Portable. Write today.

SEND COUPON WHILE LOW PRICES HOLD

CLIP COUPON NOW. . .

Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 164-12
315 Fourth Ave., New York, N. Y.

Please tell me how I can get a new Remington Noiseless Portable typewriter, plus FREE Typing Course and Carrying Case, for only 10c a day. Also send me, without obligation, new illustrated catalogue.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

PROSTATE
Gland Sufferers

New Improved
INVENTION
Serves thousands with
SATISFACTORY
Results

DR. W. D. SMITH, Inventor

Nervous Debility, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Lame Back, Lumbago, Sexual Weakness, Kidney and Bladder Trouble, Chronic Constipation, Despondency, Restlessness at Night are only some of the ailments, differing in individuals, that can often be ascribed to lesion of the Prostate Gland.

COUNTLESS NUMBERS AFFLICTED

Countless numbers of men suffer from these ailments, weaknesses and other physical shortcomings without knowing that very frequently they are caused by prostate failure.

MANY DOCTORS ENDORSE MASSAGE

Massaging for the alleviation of Prostate Trouble is as old as time, and some of the most outstanding authorities in the medical profession recommend massage as a safe, effective treatment. (See Reference Book of the Medical Sciences, Vol. VII, 3rd Edition).

USE "PROSAGER"

—a new invention which enables any man to massage his Prostate Gland in the privacy of his home.

It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No drugs or Electricity.

UNSOLICITED LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

We receive each month scores of testimonial letters for benefits received. The following are extracts taken from letters of a few of the satisfied users of our "Prosager". The complete letters and addresses will be sent to anyone who is interested in inquiring for them.

Mr. S. W. Harrison, Brewer, Maine, writes regarding the Prosager: I have received wonderful relief by means of the Prosager. It certainly has made a new man out of me and if you want to use my name in your testimonials you are welcome to do so.

Mr. A. P. Hoffman, Cleveland, Ohio, writes: The Prosager is helping very much and would not be without it.

Mr. J. W. Geary, Sebring, Florida, states in his letter: Received the Prosager May 20th, my prayers have been answered, I have used it six times and am a different man.

Mr. Salem Curtis, Phoenix, Arizona, states: The Prosager is doing fine, I want to congratulate Dr. Smith for his great invention.

Mr. S. V. Kindig, writes in letter: I feel 20 years younger and I would not take anything for the Prosager if I could not get another.

We do not publish our users' letters unless we have their permission to do so.

FREE BOOKLET Explains Vital Details and Our TRIAL OFFER

A one cent post card with name and address plainly written is all that is necessary, address card to

MIDWEST PRODUCTS CO. B-7026 KALAMAZOO, MICH.

VACU-MATIC SCORES AGAIN!

BOB McKENZIE
TRANSCONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION
COAST TO COAST

WESTERN UNION TIMED

NEW YORK TO LOS ANGELES 64 HRS. 40 MIN.

LOS ANGELES TO NEW YORK 57 HRS. 56 MIN.

CANADA 10,000 MILES 10 Days

LOS ANGELES TO NEW YORK AND RETURN 121 HRS. 52 MIN.

WASHINGTON, D.C. TO MEXICO CITY 62 HRS. 27 MIN.

LOS ANGELES TO PHOENIX 9 HRS. 15 MIN.

MUROC DRYLAKE 1267 MI. IN 1 DAY

LOS ANGELES TO SAVANNAH, GA. 49 HRS. 37 MIN.

HALIFAX, N.S. TO VANCOUVER, B. C. 94 HRS. 21 MIN.

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.
7617 W. State St.
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Dear Sirs:

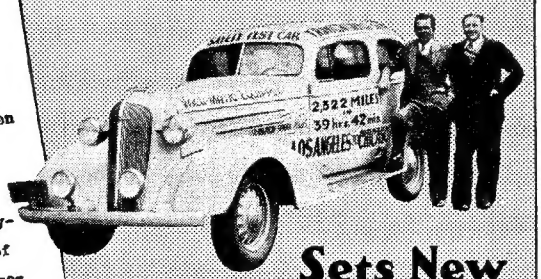
Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, driving a 1936 Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 2322 miles in thirty-nine hours and forty-two minutes, officially timed by Western Union, which gave me an average speed of 59.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 18 1/2 miles per gallon on gasoline.

Before leaving Los Angeles, we made several test runs both with and without the Vacu-matic, and the tests proved that Vacu-matic increased my gas mileage 3 1/2 miles per gallon at the driving speed of 60 M.P.H. and also very noticeable inorease in both acceleration and power.

After this experience with Vacu-matic, you can depend that on my future speed runs across country that I will be depending on Vacu-matic to give me the same added performance it has proven on this last record breaking drive.

Yours very truly,
Bob McKenzie



Sets New Coast-to-Chicago Record

New Supercharge Principle SAVES GAS

MORE POWER - MORE SPEED
FASTER PICK-UP - - NEW LIFE

ESTABLISHING new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic again scores in a new speed record established by Bob McKenzie transcontinental automobile champion. Los Angeles to Chicago — 2,322 miles in 39 hours and 42 minutes— driving 75 and 80 to maintain a speed average of 59.7 miles per hour!

Here is speed—a gruelling grind—where quick accelaration, greater top speed — and less stops for gasoline mean those precious moments saved that make new speed records possible.

The same Vacu-matic that helped Bob McKenzie establish this speed record and gave him such fine gas savings is now available for all car owners. It is positively automatic—simple to install—inexpensive—and pays for itself many times over in gas savings.

Automatic - - Nothing Like It!

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. It is so simple it will amaze you—so practical it will save you many dollars on gas costs.

Agents and Salesmen

VACU-MATIC offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Valuable territories now being assigned. Check and mail coupon.

Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and fused into one unit, correctly adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Easily attached in ten minutes.

The VACU-MATIC Co. Wauwatosa, Wis.

Guaranteed Gas Savings

VACU-MATIC must prove itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worthwhile gas savings, quicker pick-up and more power, or it costs you nothing. "On my V-8 Ford it works miracles", says Ralph Fields. James Seeley —"On an International Truck on a round trip to Cleveland, 385 miles, it saved 19 gallons of gas." A. V. Grove —"On the Buick it showed 5 miles more per gallon." F. S. Peck—"I average 22 miles per gal. on my Plymouth, an increase of 7 miles, for a saving of $15.00 a month, or $180.00 a year." Wm. Lyons—"Averaged 25 miles on a gal. with a Model A Ford at 40 miles per hour."

Free Details

You owe it to yourself to know all about this remarkable discovery. Mail the coupon below. Start saving gas with VACU-MATIC and enjoy a new driving thrill! There's no obligation—so get the facts now! Write today!

—FREE OFFER COUPON—

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-359 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested in selling proposition.

ANNOUNCEMENT
of New Coffee Agency Openings

EARNINGS UP TO $60.00 IN A WEEK

Over 350 more men and women are needed at once to open up fine-paying Coffee Agencies right in their own home localities. If you are looking for a bona fide chance to make as high as $60.00 in a week, starting at once, this company will send you everything you need, give you all the help you require, and back you up with its proven successful plans. You risk no money. A chance to be independent, work as you please, and make more than just a modest living. If you want to know whether there is an opening for you in your own or nearby locality, mail the Application below. By return mail you will be notified whether we have an opening for you, and if we have, you will receive full information about this Coffee Agency Plan. You don't send a penny—just mail the Application. No obligation—you decide after you read the plan. Don't delay. Send your Application at once.

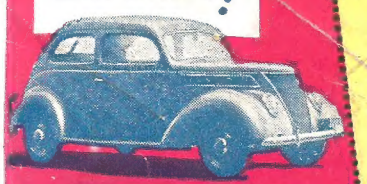
ALBERT MILLS—5030 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

OPEN TO MEN AND WOMEN

Clip Out and Mail Today!!

Plan Sent FREE
No Obligation

FORD SEDANS or $500 CASH GIVEN as a Bonus!



COFFEE AGENCY APPLICATION

1. **Write Your Full Name and Address Here**

Name.....
(State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address.....

City and State.....

2. **How Much Time Can You Devote to Coffee Agency?**

Mark with an "X"
☐ FULL TIME — Full time pays up to $35 to $60 in a week.
☐ PART TIME — Part time, either during the day or evenings, pays up to $22.50 in a week.

3. **State Which Bonus You Prefer—Cash or Ford Automobile**

In addition to their cash earnings, we offer our producers a cash bonus of $500.00 or a brand-new, latest model Ford Tudor Sedan. State which you would prefer if you decide to accept our offer. Mark "X" before your choice.

☐ $500 CASH BONUS
☐ LATEST MODEL FORD TUDOR SEDAN

4. **Can You Start at Once?**

Mark with an "X"
☐ YES ☐ NO

If you cannot start at once, state about when you will be able to start.

All Applications Will Be Held Strictly Confidential

SEND NO MONEY

There is no money fee of any kind required with this Application. It merely tells us that you would consider running a Coffee Agency in your locality if we have an opening for you. You will be notified *by return mail* whether your home locality is available. Then you can decide if the money-making possibilities look good to you. No obligation on your part. Those who apply first will be given preference, so be sure to mail your Application without delay—NOW! No letter is required, just the Application. Mail at once to

ALBERT MILLS, President
5030 Monmouth Ave. Cincinnati, Ohio